

BROADWAY NOIR: FILM NOIR AND MUSICAL COMEDY IN *CITY OF ANGELS* (1989)

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

City of Angels (1989) uniquely transforms the structural, thematic, and visual elements of film noir through the conventions of musical comedy and thereby subjects both genres to affectionate satire. This essay explores the connections between these idiosyncratic forms of entertainment, particularly in the ways that noir devices and tropes emerge from songs penned by Cy Coleman and David Zippel, to reach a greater understanding of the ways in which *City of Angels* depicts and comments on the cultural history of film noir. My methodology looks to literary criticism and philosophy written on both film noir and hardboiled fiction for theorization on the core elements of those genres. Those traits are measured against *City of Angels* as a work, primarily musically but also in its lyrics and dialogue, using frameworks presented within the work of Raymond Knapp, Stacy Wolf, Scott McMillin, and other scholars of musical theatre. Where relevant, I engage with histories, music theory, and non-scholarly publications for social context and reception. The essay is organized along archetypal lines, namely the private investigator and femme fatale, to show how those models inform the show's gendered characterization. It exposit indices for the 1940s and the classic Hollywood era, all pointing toward a framework where the musical comedy can function *as* a cultural history.

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Introduction

City of Angels began when songwriter Cy Coleman and playwright Michael Stewart discussed the possibility of a detective musical, in collaboration with hard-boiled writer Mickey Spillane and featuring his sleuth Mike Hammer as the protagonist. The theatrical pair had collaborated on two shows, *I Love my Wife* (1977) and *Barnum* (1980), and both were commercial and critical successes.¹ Both artists moved on to other projects, but Coleman revisited the idea of the detective idea and reached out to comedy writer Larry Gelbart in 1981 to write the book, who had just completed.² The pair had met through various mutual collaborators throughout the years, such as Neil Simon, Bob Fosse, and Stewart; and Gelbart seemed an obvious choice to Coleman because of his considerable experience playing jazz clarinet and saxophone.³ Gelbart's memoir claims that he received the phone call from Coleman in January of 1987, but an issue of *Variety* magazine from a year earlier reports that Gelbart had already finished the book of a forthcoming detective musical with Cy Coleman.⁴ Early in the writing process, Gelbart expressed distress to Coleman and lyricist David Zippel about the quality of his work, being unsatisfied by his "spoof of a detective novel."⁵ After a few months of musing, he called the songwriters out to California, where he pitched a setting with dual plots: one would be the private eye tale they had been working on, while the other would center on process of a hard-boiled novelist adapting his own work for film. This was the creative spark that the trio needed, and the rest of the writing process proceeded quickly.

¹ Stewart also wrote the original book for Coleman and Dorothy Fields' *Seesaw* (1972), but Michael Bennett's cuts and revisions pushed him to remove his name from the credits.

² Malarcher, *The Classically American Comedy of Larry Gelbart*, 268.

³ Malarcher, 269.

⁴ Gelbart, *Laughing Matters*, 238; *Variety*, "Gelbart, Weston write a Bible-based Musical."

⁵ Propst, *You Fascinate Me So: The Life and Times of Cy Coleman*, 341. Zippel is a lawyer-turned-lyricist who went on to have a fruitful career in both Hollywood and Broadway. His best known work is with Disney, namely *Hercules* (Ron Clements and John Musker, 1997) and *Mulan* (Barry Cook and Tony Bancroft, 1998).

City of Angels emerged from their collaboration: a musical comedy that attempts to adapt the stylizations of film noir and 1940s Hollywood for the stage. Musical theatre is obviously no stranger to the notion of adapting source material. Frequently, a piece of literature or an iconic person's life provides a skeletal version of the plot around which the musical is formed; for instance, three of Broadway's most canonical works, *Showboat* (1929), *Oklahoma!* (1943), and *Gypsy* (1959), draw from a novel, play, and memoir respectively. Later shows adapted the plots and settings of films, with early examples such as *Carnival!* (1961) and Coleman's own *Sweet Charity* (1966). But what precedent is there for an adaptation of a *style*? Alternative live-theatre aesthetics and conventions occasionally see use, such as *Pacific Overtures* (1976) as an interpretation of Japanese Kabuki and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1985) with its spoof of English music hall and pantomime. However, I contend that *City of Angels* uniquely transforms the structural, thematic, and visual elements of film noir through the conventions of musical comedy and thereby subjects both genres to affectionate satire.⁶ This essay will explore the connections between these rather idiosyncratic forms of entertainment, particularly in the ways that noir devices and tropes emerge from songs and musical numbers, to reach a greater understanding of the ways in which *City of Angels* depicts and comments on the cultural history of film noir.

Literature Review and Methodology

Jay Malarcher wrote on Larry Gelbart's career in his 1997 dissertation and its publication in 2003 as a book, both of which document of the genesis and creative process for *City of*

⁶ I use "genre" here gingerly, as the debate remains open about whether film noir is a genre, style, movement, or something else. It resists being defined in concrete terms, and refers more to a disposition than any mandatory set of constitutive elements. See Mark Conard, "Nietzsche and the Meaning and Definition of Noir" in *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 6-14., for an overview of the conflicting literature.

Angels.⁷ While the author offers great insight into Gelbart's perspective from personal interviews and archival work with his papers at UCLA, his work on Coleman contains scant analysis and even factual inaccuracies about the composer's other work. Applause Books published a biography of Coleman in 2015 by theatre journalist Andy Propst, offering a fairly comprehensive overview of his life and career including *City of Angels*. The book is invaluable as a reference on Coleman the person, yet Propst still limits his engagement with the music to anecdotes and general statements.⁸ These two pieces encompass the totality of scholarship on *City of Angels*, which reflects a trend for the songwriter. In a career spanning six decades, Coleman composed successfully in a wide range of media, including television, popular song, film, and the Broadway musical. He won Tonys, Emmys, Grammys, a place in the Songwriter's Hall of Fame, in the American Theatre Hall of Fame, the ASCAP Foundation Richard Rodgers Award, and was recorded by legends such as Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett. And yet, little scholarly work has attempted to grapple with Coleman's output directly, instead featuring him in terms of collaborations with more famous partners. He gets a brief nod in Geoffrey Block's influential *Enchanted Evenings* within the Sondheim chapter, where the link is Hal Prince, who directed *On the Twentieth Century* (1978) in the midst of his prolific partnership with Sondheim. Even so, Block simply calls Coleman a "distinguished composer with a long career who flourished in the Sondheim-Lloyd Webber era."⁹ Speaking of Sondheim, Steven Swayne brings up Coleman as a contemporary composer whose shows made up a significant portion of Sondheim's record

⁷ Malarcher, *The Classically American Comedy of Larry Gelbart*.

⁸ Propst, *You Fascinate Me So*. Propst just released a book on the Betty Comden – Adolph Green partnership through Oxford University Press in February 2019. I have not had the opportunity to read it, but I am skeptical about whether he will attempt any more musical criticism than he did in the biography.

⁹ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 348.

collection, speculating on how Coleman's scores contributed to Sondheim's musical language.¹⁰¹¹

The show that gets the most attention is Coleman's third complete Broadway score: *Sweet Charity* (1966). He collaborated on the songs with the legendary Dorothy Fields, while Neil Simon provided the book. Yet the brightest spotlight fell on superstar performer Gwen Verdon, wife and muse of Bob Fosse, who choreographed the show. These titans of the stage already position Coleman on the outside of attention – Fields and Fosse each received monographs in the Oxford University Press Broadway Legacies series within the last decade, neither of which attempts real detail on Coleman's contributions to the show.¹² *Sweet Charity* earns more attention in the second part of Raymond Knapp's survey of the American musical, focusing mainly on the cyclic nature of the plot and the role of Charity in the lineage of "Bad Girls" as Broadway heroines.¹³ Stacy Wolf's feminist history of Broadway positions the character of Charity within the tensions of the working "Single Girl," as a "reflection of the contradictory messages about women and female sexuality that circulated in 1960s culture."¹⁴ Coleman's other shows get occasional attention within scholarship of wider scope: *Barnum* (1980) appears as a case study in a 2000 theatre dissertation on musical biographies, though Coleman's details are restricted to the solely biographical and his other Tony award-winning biographical musical, *The Will Rogers Follies* (1991), does not appear in even the extended

¹⁰ Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound*, 89.

¹¹ While nowhere near the scope of this thesis, a study on the duality of Stephen Sondheim and Cy Coleman could be a scholastic treasure trove. The two are almost exact contemporaries, but lived opposite lives and valued tremendously different aspects of music for the theatre. Musicology has made clear its preference; the literature on Sondheim far exceeds the space of this footnote.

¹² Greenspan, *Pick Yourself Up*, 202-16; Winkler, *Big Deal*, 107-38. See also Greenspan's discussion of *Seesaw* on 218-23 and Winkler's work on *Little Me* (1963) on 96-104.

¹³ Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*, 228-40.

¹⁴ Wolf, *Changed for Good*, 61-6, quotation from 63.

appendix despite falling within the date range.¹⁵ That show does get a spotlight in Warren Hoffman's book about race on Broadway, and the section makes some smart insights about its political message within the context of the 1990s.¹⁶ For musicological study of Cy Coleman, and *City of Angels* specifically, the door seems to be wide open.

My methodology looks to literary criticism and philosophy written on both film noir and hardboiled fiction for theorization on the core elements of those genres.¹⁷ Those idiosyncratic traits are measured against *City of Angels* as a work, primarily musically but also in its lyrics and dialogue, using frameworks presented within the work of Raymond Knapp, Stacy Wolf, Scott McMillin, and other scholars of musical theatre. Where relevant, I engage with histories, music theory, and non-scholarly publications for social context and reception.

¹⁵ Hart, *Life on the Wicked Stage*.

¹⁶ Hoffman, *The Great White Way*, 184-92. I struggle with this piece of scholarship due to some uninformed claims it makes about musical comedies in the 1920's, particularly on *Showboat* (1929), for which there's more than enough literature to expect accuracy.

¹⁷ Throughout this essay, I will use *hardboiled* fiction and *film noir* more or less interchangeably. While not synonymous in their themes, many of the landmark films of that movement draw from the novels as source material. Plus, in his research for book-writing, Larry Gelbart engaged both with films and novels of the 1930s - 50s. Malarcher, *Tickets to his Head*, 288.

Chapter 1: The Show

As the title suggests, *City of Angels* takes place in Los Angeles. Rather than presenting a single narrative, it tells two stories parallel to one another. The first is a movie about private investigator Stone's hunt for the stepdaughter of femme fatale Alaura. The other storyline follows Stine, hardboiled fiction author and creator of Stone, as he adapts his novel for the silver screen, navigates Hollywood, and deals with his meddling director Buddy Fidler. The two stories inform one another: dialogue and conflict in the Hollywood setting (Stine's world) result in part from what happens in the movie setting (Stone's world) and vice versa. In a metatheatrical spin, *City of Angels* emphasizes the interaction of the two stories by using the same actors in both settings except for Stone and Stine, who are performed by different people: everyone else in the cast has one role in the Hollywood plot and one in the movie plot. (See Table 1.) This is explained as part of Stine's creative process, where his real-life experiences are reflected in his writing. As a result, an actor or actress will have a parallel role in the life of both Stone and Stine. For instance, the actress who plays Oolie, the fictional detective's playful secretary, also portrays Donna, Buddy's real-life secretary. Stine's wife Gabby shares an actress with Stone's lost love Bobbi. The femme-fatale Alaura, wife to powerful and affluent Luther Kingsley, doubles as Carla, an actress and wife of the similarly powerful Buddy, whose actor plays a movie mogul in the film. Without listing out the double for everyone in the rather extensive cast, one can see the connections that drive the pairings. However, the functions of these pairings can range extensively; sometimes the doublings should be taken as literal transfer of personality traits, while others might be read as a juxtaposition or contradiction. The nature of Stine's relationship with the Hollywood characters, from his flawed and immature perspective, plays a significant role in the creation of the film noir character archetypes.

Table 1: Role Doublings in *City of Angels*

Hollywood	Film
Stine: a writer of fiction	<No doubling>
<No doubling>	Stone: a private eye
Donna: Buddy's secretary	Oolie: Stone's secretary
Carla Haywood: Buddy's wife	Alaura Kingsley: a femme fatale
Gabby: Stine's wife	Bobbi: Stone's ex-fiancée
Buddy: a movie director/producer	Irwin S. Irving: a movie mogul
Pancho Vargas: an actor	Lt. Muñoz, a police detective
Avril Raines: a starlet	Mallory Kingsley: Alaura's stepdaughter
Studio Cops	Sonny and Big Six: thugs
Jimmy Powers: a crooner	Jimmy Powers
Dr. Sebastian Mandril	Gilbert: Buddy's Barber
Luther Kingsley: Alaura's husband	Werner Krieger: an actor
Peter Kingsley: Alaura's stepson	Gerald Pierce: an actor
Mahoney: a studio press agent	Del Dacosta: a songwriter

The intertwined and parallel plotlines are summarized in Table 2, and perhaps most easily narrated in succession. (See Table 2.) The *City of Angels* overture plays while displaying a large movie poster with the phrase “COMING SOON. CITY OF ANGELS. A BUDDY FIDLER PRODUCTION.” The colorful poster fades to black and white as the focus shifts to Stone lying atop a gurney. His voice-over sets up a flashback device, moving the action to a week prior. Stone and his secretary Oolie receive a visit from Alaura Kingsley, who hires the private eye to locate her missing step-daughter Mallory. Stone hesitates to take the job, but agrees when offered more than his usual fee. He is visited later that evening by two thugs, Sonny and Big Six. The duo physically assaults Stone, promising to finish the job if he goes through with the Kingsley case. When the detective eventually comes to, we learn that he is an ex-police officer. A flashback to his younger days shows an incident where his fiancé, the nightclub singer Bobbi,

sleeps with movie mogul Irwin S. Irving. He confronts the man, and an intentionally ambiguous altercation leads to the death of Irving. Stone's badge is stripped but no charges are pressed, drawing the ire of his now former partner Muñoz. The flashback ends, and in the main fictional timeline, Stone visits the Kingsley mansion to rescind his job acceptance, where he meets the physically and mentally incapacitated Luther Kingsley, Kingsley's "spiritual guide" Dr. Mandril, and his son Peter Kingsley. Instead of quitting the case, however, a sexually charged encounter with Alaura sends Stone off to find Mallory with renewed vigor. His search through the seediest parts of L.A. turns up short, yet he finds the young woman waiting naked in bed. Upon getting the detective into a compromised position, an unknown person bursts in to take a photo; Mallory runs off, stealing Stone's gun on the way out. That gun is used to murder Dr. Mandril off-stage, giving Muñoz all of the evidence he needs to put Stone in cuffs. Oolie visits the detective in his cell, and he sends her off to do some research into who might have framed him. Stone's bail gets posted by Big Six and Sonny, who only sprung the cash because whoever hired them wants Stone dead on their terms. The duo's elaborate, phone-call-explosion device backfires when Stone escapes his bonds, and a different phone call with Oolie reveals Alaura's true intent to murder her husband. He confronts the femme fatale at Kingsley Manor, joined partway by Peter and Mallory who claim to be working to stop their stepmother. Alaura and Stone grapple for her gun briefly before three shots ring out, leaving her dead and him at least wounded.

The above plot is presented alongside hardboiled fiction author Stine as he adapts his novel for the silver screen. Our first peek into Hollywood shows a phone call between Buddy and Stine as the director criticizes elements of the opening movie clip in Stone's office. Stine's wife Gabby does not approve of Stine's participation in this project, recognizing that her husband will have to compromise his artistic vision. She returns to their home in New York,

warning Stine that she'll know if he fools around with another woman as he has done in the past. At Stine and Buddy's next meeting, the director assures the writer that his creative control comes from a place of expertise and claims that he only wants to make their movie better. A few days later, Donna delivers a few pages to Stine with feedback from Buddy. Their flirting leads to an affair, yet Stine still regularly calls to check in with his wife. Buddy's next major edit comes as a reorientation for the character of Muñoz, stripping the character of a social platform. When Stine acquiesces, Stone appears to speak directly to his creator. They argue over who is more important between them, but Stine ultimately writes in the edit demanded by Buddy. We next see a recording session for crooner Jimmy Powers as he tracks "Stay with Me." An evening soiree for the cast and creative team of *City of Angels* allows Stine to meet the actresses playing Alaura and Mallory, Carla and Avril respectively, and he learns that Carla is having an affair with Jimmy Powers. While at the event, Gabby calls Stine's hotel room, and Donna picks it up. The writer flies to New York to give a farfetched apology, but his wife sees through the lies and sends him off. When he arrives in LA, he finds out that Buddy and Donna have written the last scene for him, totally changing the dialogue. He confronts Buddy on the movie set, but the filming begins anyway with Jimmy Powers in the role of Stone. Stine stops the take, breaks off his contract with Buddy, and disarms the studio security with the help of the "real" Stone "typing out" the actions in his head. The two are reconciled and the entire ensemble joins in to celebrate.

Table 2: *City of Angels* Scene Summary

Act 1

Hollywood	Film
	Scene 1: L.A. County Hospital
	Scene 2: Stone's Office "Double Talk"
Scene 3: Buddy Fidler's/Stine's Offices "Double Talk"	
	Scene 4: Stone's Office
Scene 5: Stine's bedroom	
	Scene 6: Stine's Bedroom/Stone's Office "What You Don't Know about Women"
	Scene 7: Stone's Bungalow "Look Out for Yourself"
Scene 8: Buddy's Office "The Buddy System"	
	Scene 9: Stone's Bungalow
	Scene 10: The Blue Note Cocktail Lounge "With Every Breath I Take"
	Scene 11: Bobbi's Dressing Room
Scene 12: Stine's Office	
	Scene 13: The Kingsley Mansion
	Scene 14: The Solarium "The Tennis Song"
	Scene 15: The Search "Ev'rybody's Gotta Be Somewhere"
	Scene 16: Stone's Bungalow "Lost and Found"
Scene 17: Donna's Bedroom	
	Scene 18: Stone's Bungalow
	Scene 19: L.A. County Morgue
Scene 20: Buddy's Office	
	Scene 21: The Morgue "All You Have to Do is Wait" "You're Nothing Without Me"

Table 2: cont.

Act 2

Scene 1: A Recording Studio “Stay with Me”	
Scene 2: A Bel-Air Bedroom	
	Scene 3: L.A. County Jail
	Scene 4: Oolie’s Bedroom “You Can Always Count on Me”
	Scene 5: Donna’s Bedroom “You Can Always Count on Me”
Scene 6: A Bel-Air Garden	
Scene 7: Buddy’s Study	
	Scene 8: The Jail
Scene 9: Buddy’s Study	
Scene 10: The Bel-Air Garden	
	Scene 11: Alaura’s Bedroom
Scene 12: Buddy’s Office	
Scene 13: Stine’s Apartment, New York “It Needs Work”	
	Scene 14: Margie’s Place, a Brothel
	Scene 15: The Red Room “With Every Breath I Take” (reprise)
	Scene 16: A Pay Phone
	Scene 17: The Kingsley Solarium
Scene 18: Stine’s Office “Funny”	
	Scene 19: Soundstage, Master Pictures Studio “I’m Nothing without You”

These somewhat convoluted plots weave in and around one another as the events of one inform the other. To avoid confusion on which side is being featured, the set is literally divided half; one side uses a black and white palette, replete with the chiaroscuro lighting so characteristic of film noir. The Hollywood half conveys a muted, technicolor color scheme. The divide allows for clear distinction between the realms, and both are indices for the 1940s.

More interesting, however, and particularly relevant for this thesis, is how Cy Coleman simulates the music of film noir. *City of Angels* features a score based on a classic cinematic

orchestral sound and jazz of the 1940s. The former seems a given, considering half of the show ostensibly takes place on screen, but the jazz element is more of an editorial choice by Coleman. Despite the “widespread belief that jazz and film noir were entwined during the 1940s and 1950s,” jazz had surprisingly little representation within the scores of film noir.¹⁸ This is particularly true for the first decade of the classic noir period, during which the genre appeared strategically and diegetically to signify danger; consider the famous scene of *Phantom Lady* (Robert Siodmak, 1944) when Ella Raines’ character Kansas “visits a jazz cellar and listens to the ‘hot music.’”¹⁹ Jans Wager suggests that later in noir’s classic period, “the musical discourse of jazz intensifies and magnifies intellectual values, sometimes in conflict with the emotional values in the cinematic narrative.”²⁰ She traces how jazz in noir transformed from an essentially racist device (consider the alienation present in Nat King Cole’s performance in *The Blue Gardenia* [Fritz Lang, 1953]) to a more nuanced indicator of African Americans.²¹ And yet even in the twilight years of the classic noir period, the scores used jazz primarily for specific effect rather than as a default scoring idiom.

The general populace has amassed a false joint history of the art forms, one with surprisingly widespread acceptance, which David Butler calls a *retrospective illusion*. One likely reason comes from the “crime jazz” which accompanied spy television in the 1950s and 60s. To quote the liner notes of the famous compilation album *Crime Jazz: Murder in the Second Degree*, “[Jazz] represented something lean, tough, cynical, and intelligent – adjectives that applied easily enough to the detective heroes of these pictures. These guys weren’t easily

¹⁸ David Butler., *Jazz Noir*, 2. See 61-142 for a review of the jazz that does occur in noir soundtracks.

¹⁹ Andrew Spicer, “Music” in *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*, 210.

²⁰ Jans B. Wager, *Jazz and Cocktails*, 2.

²¹ Wager, 111-128.

described by a soft violin. Instead, the metallic-yet-soulful saxophone summed up this brave new world.”²² The irony with this interpretation comes from the pragmatic rationale behind the emergence of jazz for television: the smaller ensembles were easier to afford than large string sections.²³ Another contributing factor could be later *neo-noir* films, which attempt to evoke the styles and sentiments of the classic films. Particularly prevalent in the 1970s, films such as *Farewell, My Lovely* (Dick Richard, 1975) utilize a “sinuous jazz score” as one of many “period trappings” for the original era.²⁴ Even those films that attempt to transform the core noir elements into an anachronistic setting, such as *The Long Goodbye* (Robert Altman, 1973), continuously reinterpret a new standard “based on classic jazz.”²⁵ Other important neo-noirs of the era include *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) and *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), both of which use a jazz-influenced score, despite being shot as contemporary for their release.²⁶ A final link might simply be the shared historical period between the musical and film styles. As Barry Keith Grant noted:

It is true that we tend to “anchor” music with images (often in the form of memory of specific events or places when we heard the music in the past), which is why music yoked with film images is so capable of overpowering use emotionally. Hence the nostalgic attraction of *American Graffiti*-type movies, the kind that appeal to the “historical” fantasy of “the good old days,” in which the songs are visually contextualized within their specific historical moment. Sometimes the pairing is so effective that it becomes difficult to think of them separately.”²⁷

So while the jazz idiom does not directly represent the reality of film noir, it does convey

²² Heller, *Crime Jazz: Murder in the Second Degree*, 1999.

²³ David Butler., 183.

²⁴ Newman, “Murder My Sweet/Farewell, My Lovely, in *The BFI Companion to Crime*, 235.

²⁵ Sherwood Magee, *Robert Altman’s Soundtracks*, 75.

²⁶ See Krin Gabbard, *Jammin’ at the Margins*, 269-74 for discussion of how Scorsese treats uses, and the book at large for how cinema foregrounds jazz and its performers.

²⁷ Grant, “Purple Passages or fiestas in blue? Notes toward an aesthetic of vocalese.” In *Representing Jazz*, 291.

how the art form is popularly remembered. In an interview for *The New York Times*, Coleman admitted that he believed himself to be the only composer on Broadway capable of writing a show like *City of Angels*. “To put it brazenly,” he said, “I wanted to do something that I think I’m uniquely qualified to do in the theater, which is present real jazz... I mean music whose rhythmic phrases you can’t describe but that when you’re snapping fingers to it, you say, ‘This swings.’”²⁸ Many of his songs evoke the jazz tradition “vocalese,” where an instrumental solo is paired retroactively with lyrics; this style is exemplified by groups such as Manhattan Transfer and Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross. Considering most of *City of Angels*’ music was written before its lyrics, the comparison is apt.²⁹

I do think Coleman earned the right to call his score “real jazz.” More significant than the authenticity of the idiom, however, was its sonic emulation of a specific cultural object as it is perceived. The show *sounds like* film noir and captures the philosophical and social elements that those movies represent. Not only do I think Coleman successfully wrote jazz in the theater, I contend that he, with help of Zippel and Gelbart, wrote, in *City of Angels*, a piece of cultural history. Historians of culture strive, “to capture the less tangible, less quantifiable aspects of the human past, the expression of meaning, values, symbols, ideas, knowledge, and ideology, as packaged within cultural texts.”³⁰ Film noir and hardboiled fiction *are* those cultural texts, and *City of Angels* is an attempt to realize those undercurrents of meaning. Coleman’s “real jazz” contributed a critical element and served as a tool to that end.

²⁸ Holden, “City of Angels’ Songs Echo the Jazzy Youth of their Composer.”

²⁹ Propst, 340-341.

³⁰ Avila, *American Cultural History*, 3.

Chapter 2: The Detective

For the remaining and greater part of this essay, I consider the themes of film noir as they appear in *City of Angels*, particularly those associated with the quintessential character archetypes of the private investigator and the femme fatale. I find precedent within the noir canon and measure them against conventions of musical comedy. The first characters for discussion are the private investigator Stone and his author Stine. These parallel protagonists represent the duality of film noir and musical comedy, and several of the numbers exist to connect their worlds. I will first consider the history and typical traits of the detective, along with the songs that comment on those characteristics. Later, I will examine how Stine is characterized as a contradiction of the noir protagonist at the beginning of *City of Angels*, but eventually arrives at a similar situation as Stone.

The earliest examples of the hardboiled private investigator archetype come from the pulp fiction magazines of the Depression era, particularly in the work of Dashiell Hammett, but the model is perhaps best exemplified a bit later by Phillip Marlowe from the novels of Raymond Chandler (first appearance in *The Big Sleep*, 1939). Many characteristics are little more than stylistic; particularly in Chandler's novels, the hardboiled detective shows a proclivity for poignant metaphors as he describes people or places, sometimes in stereotyped gender imagery. Some examples: "He had a heart as big as one of Mae West's hips," and "I went back to the seasteps and moved down them as cautiously as a cat on a wet floor."³¹ Gelbart wrote Stone as an heir to this style; consider his description of Alaura at their first meeting: "She had the kind of face a man could hang a dream on, a body that made the Venus De Milo look all thumbs, and

³¹ Chandler, "Farewell, My Love," 338, 407.

only the floor kept her legs from going on forever.”³² Beyond these surface level traits, however, the hardboiled detective represents a rugged morality set apart from a fundamentally corrupt and broken world. As Chandler himself put it in his definition of the hardboiled hero, “Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid... He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it.”³³ These qualities are not drawn from a place of idealism, but rather, as Susanna Lee has put it, “individual accountability as a continual and reparative response to... modern cultural crises.”³⁴ The irony in this sentiment comes from the resonance between the seemingly individualistic ethics and “the traditional and even religious principles he claims to ignore.”³⁵ Nevertheless, the hardboiled/noir protagonist’s *goodness* stands out as one of his most prominent traits, perhaps eclipsed only by an awareness of the encroaching “ethically irrational universe.”³⁶ This leads to a jaded view of the world, with skepticism and paranoia tinting many of their decisions, which definitely applies to *City of Angels*’ Stone. As later analysis of Stine and those in Hollywood will show, these characteristics are exacerbated by the unethical, unprincipled behavior of the “real world” plot.

In a chapter tracing the development of the hardboiled hero, Jerold J. Abrams assembled a chart that juxtaposes the typical archetype (modeled specifically off of Sam Spade and Phillip Marlowe) against perhaps the most famous of fictional detectives: Sherlock Holmes (Table 3). One can spot numerous characteristics that apply to Stone’s situation, many of which interact fascinatingly with Coleman’s and Zippel’s musical numbers. Those that appear in boldface will

³² Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel,

³³ Chandler, “Simple Art of Murder,” 59.

³⁴ Lee, *Hard-boiled Crime Fiction and the Decline of Moral Authority*, 6.

³⁵ Lee, 7.

³⁶ Woolfolk, “The Horizons of Disenchantment”, 108.

be discussed in their sonic and musical manifestation, as will other traits as theorized by literature on hardboiled fiction and film noir.

Table 3: The Detective Model³⁷ Bold-type indicates corresponding musical number

Classic: Sherlock Holmes	Hard-Boiled: Spade/Marlowe
Setting: less realistic (can be fantastic)	Setting: always realistic (and urban)
Uses drugs (morphine and cocaine)	Uses alcohol (typically bourbon)
First-person singular about friend	First-person singular voice-over
Mind: two sides (slow-creative vs. fast-precise)	Mind: steady, even
Lives with friend (Dr. Watson)	Lives alone, has no friends
Femme-Fatale (Anti-Ariadne) nonessential	Femme-fatale (anti-Ariadne) essential
Method: science of deduction (but is really musement)	Implicit method: abduction (without abduction and musement)
Character is intellectual (scholarly)	Character is nonintellectual
Natural opponents: Scotland Yard	Natural opponent: city cops
Artistic (enjoys music, plays violin)	Nonartistic
Well-traveled (e.g., knows foreign tattoos)	Not traveled
Work is a game (“the game is afoot”)	Work is just a job (for fee only)
Upper-class tastes and manners	Middle class: an “Everyman”
Languid, nonphysical	Tough, aggressive (fistfights)
Link to medicine with Dr. Watson (detective clues like medical symptoms)	Stories are typically nonmedical
No regular weapons (save reason)	Carries a gun (and shoots people)
Smokes a pipe	Smokes cigarettes
Form is masochistic	Form is sadistic
Hobbies: beekeeping, violin, drugs, etc.	No hobbies (flatter character form)
Mannerist Maze	Rhizomatic Maze

The first trait for discussion is the rivalry between city police officers and the private eye, with its corresponding number “All You Have to Do is Wait.” In this scene, Muñoz has Stone in cuffs following the murder of Dr. Mandril with the shamus’ stolen gun (Act 1, Scene 21). Several noir films provide precedent for a situation in which the protagonist at odds with law enforcement, including *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett, 1949) and *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958). Perhaps even more than those films, however, *City of Angels* portrays a Cop-Detective relationship with personal animosity and paints Muñoz as gleeful about Stone’s

³⁷ Abrams, “From Sherlock Holmes to the Hard-Boiled Detective”, 78.

arrest. The musical stage has seen its fair share of law enforcement, but rarely are they this malicious. More common are police officers such as those in Gilbert & Sullivan's operetta *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879) who amount to little more than buffoonery; perhaps closest to Muñoz are Lieutenant Schrank and Officer Krupke from *West Side Story* (1957), though even they fail to present a menacing threat. In contrast, "All You Have to Do is Wait" celebrates the possibility of capital punishment, suggesting several options as satisfactory routes to death. The "chair," "asphyxiation," and "cyanide" are all promising prospects to Muñoz, and he makes it clear to Stone that his arrest and forthcoming punishment satisfy a long-held grudge, perhaps overemphasizing the trope of conflict between cop and private eye.

However, the number also renders an essentialized version of a Mexican-American as might be present in 1940s cinema. Megan Woller reminds us of performers such as Carmen Miranda who "developed a highly stylized Latin persona," in order to "[add] an exotic (and popular) flair."³⁸ Listening to "All You Have to Do is Wait" might make one bristle at the seemingly stereotyped depiction of a Latino man. The lyrics are rather heavy-handed with clichés, suggesting that was Zippel's goal; post-war cinema was not known for its nuanced depiction of people of color. Stine, and by extension Gelbart, intended for the officer to be more sympathetic and serve as a platform for a social message, one which has striking relevance today. In the "original" version, Officer Muñoz expresses frustration with Stone primarily due to his white privilege in emerging unscathed from a scandal involving the murder of Irwin S. Irving (Act 1, Scene 14). The police officer chastises his former partner for literally getting away with murder, insisting that Stone's amnesty was only made possible by the color of his skin. Muñoz avows to keep close tabs on Stone, promising to nail him for any step out of line. But instead of

³⁸ Megan Woller, "This is our Turf!: Puerto Rican Youths in the 1961 Film Adaptation of *West Side Story*," 30.

this racially driven motivation, Buddy demanded that the police officer wield jealousy for Bobbi as his main motivation, a command to which Stine ultimately acquiesces.

Corresponding with its lyrical focus on Muñoz's ethnicity, "All You Have to Do is Wait" stands out in *City of Angels* with its utilization of Latin-jazz features. The melody uses characteristically short phrases of a single repeated note, resolving down by step or third. The eighth notes are played without a swing, and the B section is syncopated similarly to some clave patterns with its three patterns across the bar line. (Ex. 1) The song's instrumentation features flute, marimba, and even maraca to support the flavor of musical character, and the three other men present echo Muñoz in block triadic harmony. These elements underline the cop's ethnic-other status within *City of Angels*, which the song merges with the traditional rivalry between film noir protagonists and city police officers.

Example 1 "All You Have to Do is Wait," *City of Angels*, mm. 28-31.



The tension between police officers and private detectives typically unfolds within another essential feature of film noir and hardboiled protagonists that is not present on Abrams list: its urban setting. Cultural theorist Eric Avila suggests that the source of noir pessimism is the city itself. Film noir paints a picture of urban life damned by the deterioration of safe public spaces and "traditional" social values, due significantly to the presence of "others."³⁹ This anti-

³⁹ Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 65–96.

urban message is conveyed in several of the titles from the noir movement, including examples such as *Cry of the City* (Robert Siodmak, 1948), *The Naked City* (Jules Dassin, 1948), *Dark City* (William Dieterle, 1950), and *City of Fear* (Irving Lerner, 1959). In its title, *City of Angels* resonates with these films.⁴⁰ The affectionate nickname for Los Angeles rings ironically, however, most notably in one of Stone's voice-over monologue when he compares it to "a pretty girl with the clap" (Act 1, Scene 2). Avila's study focuses on the intermingling of the cinematic movement and the real City of Angels, particularly the neighborhood of Bunker Hill.⁴¹ Hollywood seemed interested in portraying a burgeoning crime scene in its fictional depictions of L.A., and the Bunker Hill neighborhood served as the setting for several prominent films noir, such as *Criss Cross* (Robert Siodmak, 1949), *Cry Danger* (Robert Parrish, 1951), and *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1956). Avila argues that the fictional film noir depictions seeped into the consciousness of the American people, and contributed to very real consequences for Bunker Hill and its inhabitants, following the Housing Act of 1949.⁴² With the area declared "slum and blighted," several families were displaced and a significant piece of L.A.'s low-income housing was lost in the process.⁴³

Raymond Knapp has theorized that the American musical bears a similar potential to affect the public perception of a space or population. He claims that the form serves as a "source of cultural information" that "enacts a demonstration of Americanism, and often takes on a formative, defining role in the construction of a collective sense of 'America.'"⁴⁴ It achieves that

⁴⁰ The musical had the title *Death is for Suckers* for most of its writing process. *City of Angels* changed names only due to director Michael Blakemore's "profound objection" to the original. Propst, 345. See also Gelbart, *Laughing Matters*, 240.

⁴¹ Avila, *Popular Culture*, 72–73.

⁴² Jones, *The Bunker Hill Story*, 10.

⁴³ Avila, *Popular Culture*, 74–75.

⁴⁴ Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*, 103.

in part by the creation and promulgation of nationalist mythologies centered on place and community.⁴⁵ The scope of the musical expands beyond the urban realm, but its parallel function with film noir demands that the art forms be in dialogue with one another. Indeed, many of Broadway's most influential musical plays emerged concomitantly with the era of film noir; consider for instance how the standard date range for noir overlaps almost exactly with the Rodgers and Hammerstein partnership (1941-58 vs. 1943-59). *West Side Story*, an important landmark in the representation of urbanity, jazz, and Latinx, also falls within these years. *City of Angels* sits, then, in tension between the two mediums. The forthcoming section will see how the show interacts with hardboiled and musical depictions of a distinctively theatricalized urban elements of organized crime and sex workers.

The musical comedy tradition has a long-standing relationship with criminals and other shady characters, particularly in the archetype of a goofy gangster meant to draw laughs, such as Moonface Martin from *Anything Goes* (1936), created by Howard Lindsey and Russell Crouse to capitalize on the comic talents of Victor Moore.⁴⁶ Yet perhaps the most famous group of Broadway criminals appears in the cast of *Guys and Dolls* (1950). Book-writer Abe Burrows went to great lengths to imitate the flowery, slangy gangster speech made famous by the American newspaperman Damon Runyon, whose short stories provided the source material for the musical.⁴⁷ According to his biographer, "Runyon invented the Broadway of *Guys and Dolls*... He stressed fine, upstanding, dishonest people who fell in love, often to the sound of gunfire that sounded harmless."⁴⁸ Raymond Knapp has suggested that this portrayal of gangsters

⁴⁵ Knapp, *National Identity*, 119-22.

⁴⁶ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 47.

⁴⁷ Riis, *Frank Loesser*, 78-79.

⁴⁸ Breslin, *A Life of Damon Runyon*, 16-17.

in the city transferred the romanticization of the Western frontier into the heart of New York and organized crime.⁴⁹ For *City of Angels*, however, the crimes are more violent than charming, and actual bad people pose legitimate danger to the detective Stone. Brutes-for-hire Sonny and Big Six invade the shamus' apartment to deliver a beating with a message (Act 1, Scene 7) and later attempt to kill the private eye with a needlessly complex device reminiscent of a Rube Goldberg machine (Act 2, Scene 9). Compare this to the old criminals of Broadway, who wield little more than vague threats and perhaps dating advice (*Kiss Me, Kate* [1949]). One indicator of the gangsters' separation from musical comedy tradition is their lack of song or musical number. Within the musical comedy tradition, to withhold a song to a character is "to deny (him) three-dimensionality or individuality."⁵⁰ Sonny and Big Six exhibit no other traits beyond their violence at the behest of their unseen boss, and in this way feel unsatisfying as musical characters, unlike their counterparts in *Kiss Me, Kate*, who get the unforgettable eleven o'clock number "Brush Up Your Shakespeare." So while the brutes do show some degree of wit in their dialogue and reference their personal lives, Coleman damned them as functionally flat characters within musical comedy by not granting them a musical number. Interestingly, the actors who play Sonny and Big Six double as police officers on the movie set in the final scene, and Stine beats them up as part of the wacky typewriter sequence – a bonus affirmation of the protagonist/cop rivalry!

Though the gangsters did not get a song, the other theatrical urban element, sex workers, spotlights in a dynamic number in which Coleman used a distinct jazz-idiom to reflect their role. *City of Angels* was neither the first nor the last time that Coleman wrote for these characters, as

⁴⁹ Knapp, *National Identity*, 153.

⁵⁰ Block, 50.

Sweet Charity features taxi-dancers and *The Life* (1997) centers on prostitutes and pimps. In an interview for the American Theatre Wing, Coleman remarked on how the Broadway stage had evolved to allow direct engagement with the subject; Fosse and he wanted Charity and her coworkers to be prostitutes, as in the source film *Nights of Cabiria* (1957), but his producers did not think it would sell.⁵¹ *City of Angels* marks an intermediary stage in which Coleman could directly represent these topics, if not as the primary focus of the musical. The film noir and hard-boiled worlds revel and exaggerate the salacious tendencies of urban tenants, their solicitation of prostitutes and consumption of pornography. Simultaneously, their depiction affirms the standard moral view of the sex industry as held by society.⁵² Recall that the noir protagonist exists on the outside of that world as a lone beacon of morality, and must descend into the lascivious realm of his cohabitants in order to carry out his job. The implicit goal of these endeavors is less to fulfill the mission than to resist the moral corruption.⁵³ *City of Angels* takes up this motif in the first act during Stone's search sequence for Mallory (Act 1, Scene 15). The detective seeks her out in places which he considers "the bottom of the barrel," meaning in this context pornography stands and brothels. The scene occurs in the wake of Stone's visit to Kingsley manor, where he was promised \$10,000 in compensation, in addition to a tryst with Alaura. With a reward so enticing, Stone begins his search with enormous energy and urgency, reflected in Coleman and Zippel's score. Some dissection of the musical elements will show how the songwriters conveyed the detective's investigation as it dwindles from initial enthusiasm to discouraging interactions with unsavory characters. Perhaps more than other song in *City of Angels*, "Ev'rybody's Gotta Be Somewhere" conveys meaning through structure and stylistic

⁵¹ American Theatre Wing, "The Composer (Career Guides), 2001.

⁵² Leonard, "Cozzens without Sex," 216.

⁵³ Lee, *Hard-boiled Crime Fiction & The Decline of Moral Authority*, 92-7.

contrast. Coleman intersperses the song's main theme among several episodes, transformed appropriately to meet the needs of the character singing. Meanwhile, Zippel's lyrics shift from statements to questions as Stone carries out actual detective work, and with it comes music especially reminiscent of jazz solos,

After a brassy introduction with the full band, "Ev'rybody's Gotta Be Somewhere" evokes bebop with an athletic tempo, angular melodies, and minimal instrumental ensemble. Its tireless bassline and backbeat cymbal contribute to a sense of travel, mirroring Stone's expeditious pace and determination. In this first section, the Angel 4 establish the main musical theme as a pseudo-Greek chorus by declaring and commenting on Stone's situation (Ex. 2). While primarily singing in tight block harmony, the quartet diverges for a moment of text-painting in mm. 29-30 when the women sing the lyric "Try to track her down," which the men quickly mirror in contrary motion to reach more homophony a measure later, effectively tracking the women down.⁵⁴ This main section ends with the title phrase and a rhetorical single-word question: "Ev'rybody's gotta be somewhere, / But where? Where? Where? Where?" With each repeated "where," the quartet widens its chord: the initial iteration has a range of a major sixth from the bass to the soprano (F₃ – D₄), but the bass moves down by whole-steps and the soprano jumps perfect fourths for a chord that spans two octaves and a tritone (B₂ – F₅) (mm. 45-47). The size and chromaticism of this progression lacks tonal certainty, but that is perfect for emphasizing the mystery of Mallory's location. Also, the final B7^(b9/b5) resolves easily into E-Major, the tonal center for the first episode.

⁵⁴ Coleman and Zippel, *City of Angels*, 99. All forthcoming measure references in this analysis come from pp. 97-114.

Example 2 “Ev’rybody’s Gotta be Somewhere”, *City of Angels*, mm. 12-20.



Here, the men and women trade trite platitudes about the merits of effort and resilience in a search effort. The episode is brief and repetitive, but it maintains an optimism in affirmation of the initial section; simple harmony and sequential melodic patterns provide a platform for the oversimplified message. When the main theme returns, Stone sings the opening figure, only to be answered by a single member of the quartet assuaging the shamus with a transformed cliché: “This tomato is a hot potato.” The cliché phrase is in itself a link to musical comedy, particularly the lyrics of Ira Gershwin. In his own words: “the literary cliché is an integral part of lyric-writing... The phrase that is trite and worn-out when appear in print usually becomes, when heard fitted to an appropriate musical turn, revitalized, and seems somehow to revert to its original provocativeness.”⁵⁵ Rather than proceed with the melody, Stone repeats the lick with different words three more times – once in the original key beginning on C, then twice up a major third to begin on E. Each of these repetitions receives yet another cliché response from the Angel City 4, allowing each of the members a turn (though the bass shares his line with the alto).

Stone “arrives” in the red light district in mm. 102, marked by a sudden halving of the tempo. If the first half of the piece rushed around with angular melodies, this second half saunters with slinky chromatic lines. Stone introduces a melody doubled in the accompaniment (Ex. 3); these four bars become a vamp over which Stone and the Angel City 4 sing lines reminiscent of improvisatory solos. Its third and sixth chords (on the words “dame” and “gone”

⁵⁵ Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions*, 353.

in the typeset example) function as “stinger chords.” Ray Knapp defined stingers chords as “sharply attacked, dissonant chords” that are an “emblem of edginess.”⁵⁶ That edginess is justified with Stone’s new position amongst porn dealers and prostitutes, and Zippel introduces the interrogative mood, significant because this sequence consists of both verbal and musical question-answer phrases. Stone sings a seven-bar question describing his situation and ending with the inquiry: “she look familiar?” The quartet tenor, now in the role of a pornography vendor, answers with an eight-bar phrase that resembles a trumpet solo. Stone’s next interlocutors, a brothel madame and two prostitutes, similarly emulates an instrumental solo over the vamp for eight bars. None of these savory characters know Mallory’s whereabouts, but importantly they all answer Stone’s question either with bragging (“You don’t know how many women I see each day beneath innumerable guys”) or temptations for Stone (“Why dontcha let me choose a change of pace, for girls like this you came to the right place” and “You’re wise to scrutinize us. We won’t refuse, so take off your shoes. We’ll search for clues in tandem”).⁵⁷ The marriage of a jazz idiom, with its pervasive if problematic urban associations, and the overly sexualized characters symbolizes a musical rendering of how film noir treats the sex industry in the city. Stone, as the noir protagonist, have to make the “moral decision” to take his investigation to that part of town and resist the pleasures which would compromise him.

Example 3 “Ev’rybody’s... Somewhere,” *City of Angels*, mm. 102-5. (Top pitch sung 8vb.)



⁵⁶ Knapp, “The Sound of Broadway’s Mean Streets,” 239.

⁵⁷ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 77-8.

First-person, voice-over narration is the next aspect of the hardboiled model that receives treatment in *City of Angels*. The device is perhaps one of the most idiosyncratic of film noir, and Gelbart emulates it from the beginning of the show. Stone's first monologue is a disembodied pontification about death, while he ostensibly lies on a hospital gurney. This is far from the last instance in *City of Angels* where Stone provides narration, as the published libretto prescribes voice-over lines in nine out of twenty-one scenes in the first act.⁵⁸ Most of them appear near transitions of setting, usually to contextualize the place or the characters. For example, we get a voiceover about Stone's apartment when the action shifts to his dreary bungalow (Act 1, Scene 7). His lines show-off the signature hard-boiled sarcasm, with musings on the naming conventions of Los Angeles and the motley careers of his neighbors. However, the narration does more than just tell the audience what they're looking at; imminent moments of action are foreshadowed, nearly all of which bear a tone of pessimism. Looking again to the scene in Stone's apartment, the voice-over describes a certain dullness to his living situation, but immediately qualifies that dullness as "a fact I was often too dumb to appreciate."⁵⁹ Mere moments after this ominous statement, the gangsters Sonny and Big Six invade Stone's apartment, proceeding to pound the private eye.

Significantly, Stone sings his voice-over narration in one scene: near the beginning of *City of Angels* when Alaura first hires Stone (Act 1, Scene 2). Using the fake last name Villiers, Alaura presents herself initially as helpless, single, and far more naïve than we eventually find her to be. Stone sees right through the ruse and sings a quick sixteen bars as an aside to the

⁵⁸ Act I, Scenes 1, 2, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18; Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel.

⁵⁹ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 45.

audience, drowning out whatever speech Alaura is giving simultaneously. If this were a different medium, Stone might be the only character granted such an opportunity to break from the action on-stage to reflect out of book time. However, Alaura takes up the same melody to perform a musical voice-over of her own, outside of Stone's awareness. This first major scene and musical sequence introduces the audience to a critical way in which *City of Angels* differs from true film noir. In the cinematic form, a protagonist gets exclusive rights to sharing his internal musings and commentary, which can lead to an insular and one-sided perspective. Musical comedy, by contrast, allows a wider array of characters to reflect through song. In addition, Stone and Alaura's shared melody, which will also be used by Buddy and adapted by Stine in the subsequent scene, implies an undercurrent of cohesion that allows disparate characters to wield the same musical material without exchange; they never sing the melody *to* each other. This "voice of the musical," as Scott McMillin calls it, while appropriate for all those who sing it, signifies a thematic idea which is a greater point or message than any single character's position.⁶⁰ In this case, the musical voice-overs are part of a larger "Double Talk" sequence, which will get full attention shortly. Gelbart claimed that more sung voice-overs were originally planned but removed during the long rehearsal process – perhaps wisely.⁶¹ Musical asides help to establish the musical comedy/film noir schism, but too much insight into more characters than just the protagonist might compromise the suspense and mystery of the investigation.

Significantly, no true voice-overs appear in the second act. One might interpret this as a symptom of Buddy's growing control over the *City of Angels* screenplay. The voice-overs in film noir frequently have an in-plot explanation, often the pretense of the protagonist recounting the

⁶⁰ McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*, 80.

⁶¹ Gelbart, "Introduction" in Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 6.

happenings of the film as a flashback, as in the noir classics *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Dead Reckoning* (John Cromwell, 1947), and *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946). In his first appearance, Buddy astutely notes that the technique had been worn thin and directs a rewrite, breaking from the original source novel. The director does, however, seem on-board with the nightclub flashback, and the general state of Stone's career is predicated on that series of incidents from his past. Indeed, time-gone-by plays a major role in the construction of film noir narratives and affects the way in which these movies tend to "merge narrative space, time, and events in such a way that give priority to time past – 'someone (or something) is always coming out of the past.'"⁶² This manifests especially in the literal and referential appearances of Bobbi. Such moments obviously include the insertion of the nightclub flashback we just mentioned, but consider also Stone's voice-over following Mallory's hasty departure from his apartment (Act I, Scene 18). Upon discovering that the young woman has purloined his gun, he reports with a tone of resignation: "Another dame, another gun. Will I ever learn? Will I ever forget? Is my life going to be one, long flashback?"⁶³ Even if this did not lead into another literal flashback (of which Buddy also disapproves), the language shows how the events surrounding Bobbi and Irwin S. Irving remain a force in his life. Stone cannot ignore the bitter irony of once again being compromised by a woman and his firearm, and he seems aware of the cyclical nature of this misery.

The Act II brothel scene brings that misery to a head when Stone confronts Bobbi directly as part of his search for Peter Kingsley, and the ensuing number points to the ways in which film noir narratives are told, indicative of a rhizomatic, labyrinthine world. Drawing from

⁶² Woolfolk, "The Horizon of Disenchantment" in *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, 117.

⁶³ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 86.

French philosophy and with a name rooted in agriculture, a rhizomatic maze is one with no entrance or exit but always the middle.⁶⁴ Bobbi's new profession as a prostitute resonates with the rhetoric with Stine's wife, who called her husband a literary prostitute; this is his retaliation. However, that detail actually has little bearing on the pain which Stone seems to feel in seeing her once again and does not directly inform the number's function vis à vis film noir. More important is Bobbi's appearance late in the story, which shows, in the present, "a return of characters who were thought to belong to the past [and] who, it seemed, had been bypassed as the protagonist embarked on a 'fresh start.'"⁶⁵ Bobbi and Stone should have made a clean break, and intended to according to the scene where his badge is stripped (Act 1, Scene 19). However, the noir-like privileging of events past does not allow the opportunity. In the duet reprisal of "With Every Breath I Take", the shamus laments his inability to let Bobbi go (Act II, Scene 15). The theme arose in the Act I voice-over preceding Bobbi's nightclub performance: "Whoever said time heals all wounds had never met anyone like Bobbi."⁶⁶ The haunting line does more than just set up the scene at the Blue Note lounge, and Stone finally gets the opportunity to properly express the depth of his pain in the duet. His words riff on the idea expressed earlier, by trying "to let the memory of (Bobbi) die slow / By letting time be (his) friend, / By letting go of what was, / The pain will end."⁶⁷ Of course, Stone is not lucky enough for his strategy to succeed, evidenced by the lingering specter of Bobbi. This failure of time to act as a salve to his suffering confirms the noir negation of time as progress, privileging events in the past over what might simply be considered "moving on."

⁶⁴ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 72-3.

⁶⁵ Woolfolk, 117.

⁶⁶ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 57.

⁶⁷ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 169-71. All forthcoming lyrics in this paragraph are drawn from these pages.

After an introduction identical to the original version of the song (to be discussed in a later section of this essay), piano accompaniment plays the primary melody of “With Every Breath I Take” while Stone sings in counterpoint with the words above. Orchestrator Billy Byers’ decision holds dramatic significance, as the use of piano evokes a nightclub setting. In fact, one might assert that Bobbi herself functions as if she were still at the Blue Note Lounge. She only sings lyrics that were a part of her first torch song and nearly the same notes – with one or two instances where Stone takes lines from her. Bobbi remains, musically, in the past; while Stone interjects new subjects, she has not progressed in her musical state since Act I. One must even question whether the detective is singing in duet with the Bobbi of the present or with a fantasized memory of the night he proposed at the club. Although somewhat veiled behind the music and lyrics with which the audience is already familiar (and therefore more likely to latch upon), Stone’s biggest contribution to the reprisal is that he “welcomes death” if such an end will allow him to escape the ache of Bobbi. This is more than hyperbole – it reminds the audience that this entire plot has grown out of Stone’s flashback while lying atop a gurney, and it foreshadows the violent conclusion to his story.

Unpleasant or tragic endings tend to be the norm rather than the exception in film noir. Whether by the death of the protagonist or some other conclusion of failure, they tend to “end badly and emphasize a fundamental inescapability” from the circumstances.⁶⁸ Consider for instance the ending of *The Maltese Falcon*, in which Sam Spade discovers the titular statue to be counterfeit, trivializing all of the death that preceded the revelation as well as the betrayal of his lover. Look also to the ending of *Kiss Me Deadly*, where Gabrielle betrays Dr. Soberin, shoots Mike Hammer, and perishes from a critical explosion of radionuclide material. This is perhaps a

⁶⁸ Abrams, 84.

symptom of the rhizomatic maze of the hardboiled detective's trial. A maze is a poignant metaphor for the film noir, as the narratives tend to emphasize emerging from the situation more than just solving a mystery - consider how "Ev'rybody's Gotta Be Somewhere" is the only number where Stone does actual investigating. The characters in film noir "are trapped in circumstances that they did not wholly create and from which they cannot break free."⁶⁹ It is intentionally unclear whether or not Stone "survives" the encounter at Kingsley Manor, but his residence within the noir world predestined a conclusion marked more by pain than resolution; his re-emergence at the end of the musical should not be taken as indicative of his survival, and a later section in this essay will show how that situation intentionally evokes musical comedy at the expense of film noir tropes. Stone's voice-overs and songs revealed a degree of pessimism that pointed to his violent end throughout *City of Angels*, but along the way we have seen a different character fall from a place of optimism to jadedness: Stine. It seems appropriate here to turn the color back on and engage with the main character on the Hollywood side of *City of Angels*.

⁶⁹ Sanders, "Film Noir and the Meaning of Life", 93.

Chapter 3: The Writer

In the *New York Times* review of the original *City of Angels* production, critic Frank Rich brought up one sour point among several sweet ones: the casting of Gregg Edelman as Stine. While Rich conceded Edelman as a “powerful singer,” he questioned the casting an actor with “affable boyishness” on the grounds that “it’s hard to believe he could have created a character as worldly as Mr. Naughton’s Stone.”⁷⁰ I contend that such a naiveté is critical for Stine’s characterization and position in relation to the tropes and themes of film noir. At the outset of *City of Angels*, the author represents a complete antithesis of the pessimism and jadedness that define the noir protagonist. He has recently entered a new contract to write a screenplay, a medium for which he has no experience and must attempt in stifling collaboration with director Buddy; consider that against the rugged experience and loner persona of a hardboiled private eye. His first musical number, “Double Talk,” is a culmination of the musical and thematic ideas presented in the sung voice-overs of the preceding scenes, and it establishes the doomed optimism of Stine in a rather conventionally placed “I Am” song.

Prior to Stine’s turn, each of the previously sung entries to this musical sequence drew its character motivation from some form of distrust or manipulation of another party. For example, in Stone’s first version of the melody, sung over dialogue from Alaura, he comments on the precision with which the potential client attempted to convey naiveté and desperation (Act 1, Scene 2). He draws attention to her insidious and effective obfuscation, all of which is premeditated and calculated. And yet, Stone reveals a degree of vulnerability by admitting the danger in letting himself be distracted by her attractive physique. Perhaps, though, it is not

⁷⁰ Rich, “40’s Hollywood Doubly Mocked In Gelbart’s ‘City of Angels.’”

vulnerability as much as admitting an awareness of his own fallibility. Alaura's verse stays close to this theme of skepticism; she labels Stone's shallow refusal of the job as merely a "song and dance," and an unconvincing one at that.⁷¹ She can see through his excuses of self-preservation to his need for money, understanding that her resources will ultimately lead him to accept the case. Alaura is of course correct, and Stone's next sung moment, which will provide the exact melodic material for Stine's forthcoming echo, confirms her insights. While he acknowledges how the scheme seems questionable at best, he admits his desperation for financial compensation. But here again, Stone recognizes how his attraction to her could lead to his downfall, because he "can trust (him)self around her even less than (he) trust(s) her."⁷² This looks ahead to Stone's history of weakness towards women, which we have already discussed, but more importantly doubles down an awareness of his own fallibility. Stine has no such awareness.

The musical voice-overs make their way into the characters in Hollywood, namely the director/producer Buddy Fidler. When the scene shifts to the writer's world in Hollywood, Stine has just picked up a phone with Buddy on the other end (Act I, Scene 3). After a brief dialogue, the director admits to finding his collaboration with Stine as something of a necessary evil, comparing the author to the thorns of a rose; this is delivered with the same musical material sung by Stone and Alaura. Buddy may only have sung 16 measures, but that is plenty to broadcast the message that Hollywood characters are just as untrustworthy as those in the film. By the time Stine inherits the melody, it puts the writer's personality in all the greater relief. That

⁷¹ Perhaps, in a sung dismissal of spoken language as song and dance, there is an irony afforded only to the musical theatre medium – the phrase implies something frivolous and insincere, yet the truest indications of a character's machinations tend to be expressed in lyric time.

⁷² Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 28.

contrast, however, was likely Coleman and Zippel's purpose, as evidenced him getting to sing the most complete version of the number. With a melody that sounds like an instrumental jazz solo, akin to vocalese, his first words are shared with Stone's from earlier: "This job is not to be believed." But where Stone could not believe a word, Stine "cannot believe his luck."⁷³ Indeed, the title of "Double Talk" takes on a second meaning with Zippel's lyrics. Several phrases have two halves with at least one word in common. (Table 3) He proceeds to describe his situation as a rather successful writer of literature, believing that he is due for a totally positive experience in adapting his novel for the silver screen. Stine has already witnessed Buddy's proclivity for creative control, but sees the forthrightness as a positive trait rather than an ominous one. In the B section of "Double Talk", the key shifts to the dominant to recount a fantasy in which he sees his name "all alone on a screen [saying] 'Screenplay by Stine.'"⁷⁴ This not only broadcasts Stine as somewhat narcissistic, but foreshadows his ultimate breaking point of sharing the screenplay credit with Buddy.

Table 4: Lyric Pairings in "Double Talk"

This job is not to be <u>believed</u> .	/	And I cannot <u>believe</u> my luck.
I'm at the literary prime <u>of my life</u>	/	And I'm about to have the time <u>of my life</u>
A book of my own <u>on the screen</u>	/	See Stone <u>on the screen</u>
The credits are shown <u>on the screen</u>	/	My name all alone <u>on the screen</u>
For making movies out of <u>books</u>	/	They say that Buddy wrote the <u>book</u>

Earlier this paper mentioned one melody shared among multiple characters as indicative of the voice of the musical. For this extended musical sequence, dishonesty and "double talk" are presented as major themes which the musical itself hopes to convey by granting Stone, Alaura, Buddy, and Stine the same melody. As it is passed from character to character, the tonal center

⁷³ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 34.

⁷⁴ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 35.

shifted up a half step at a time, with its first incarnation in B-flat for Stone and ending in C-sharp for Stine. This could imply an intensification of message or perhaps simply an escalation of excitement to maintain interest in the material. Other musical elements follow the theme as it proceeds through the various key centers, and one accompaniment motive in particular should be associated with the sequence at large (Ex. 4a). The figure, which begins as a sparse bass line, underscores the dialogue leading up to the characters' musical asides. One should read this as a sonic signal from the band that whatever is being said cannot be taken at face value.⁷⁵ At the end of Stine's "Double Talk," the figure gets strewn across four octaves of brass in a display that sounds triumphant, if ironically so; by the end of *City of Angels*, Stine's optimistic outlook on Hollywood falls to pieces because he could not see other characters misleading him. As an "I Am" song, "Double Talk" succinctly establishes Stine's character and sets up the conflicts that define his progression through the show, made all the more effective by its contrast with the skeptic musical asides/voice-overs from the film noir tradition.

Example 4a "Double Talk," *City of Angels*, mm. 1-4.



Example 4b "Funny," *City of Angels*, mm. 1-4.



Stine's other solo number should be considered a mirror to "Double Talk," as it is the culmination of the writer's fall from his original place of optimism. "Funny" musically conveys his rage and frustration as a parallel to the showdown in the Kingsley solarium a scene prior,

⁷⁵ McMillin, 127-30.

merging the 11 o'clock number of musical theatre with the tragic ending of film noir. Functionally, an "11 o'clock" number comes late in the show to provide a final star turn before the main conflict has been fully resolved.⁷⁶ In the song's scene, Stine has just returned to Hollywood after a rushed trip to New York to put out a fire in his marriage, only to find that his final scene has been re-written and screenplay credit split with Buddy (Act II, Scene 18). A shouting match with Donna successfully burns the last bridge Stine might have had in Hollywood, and when he admits that he thought actual romantic feelings were growing between them, she coolly replies "Funny. I never got that impression" as she leaves.⁷⁷ Pulling its title from that final stab, the lyrics of "Funny" drip with sarcasm framed within various references to fiction or books (Such as "bedtime tale, irony, twist, scene"). Similarly to the "Double Talk" bass signal, "Funny" opens with a distinctive figure that evokes a brewing fury.⁷⁸ (Ex. 4b) It marks a return of B-flat minor, the same key used for Stone's original skeptical voice-over, signifying Stine's own jadedness. The number is somewhat conservative in terms of melodic organization, (A₈A₈B₁₂A₈A'₈) but key changes and accompaniment stylizations expand its effect.

Initially, "Funny" sits low in the tessitura and requires chewy diction to get out the string of syllables on sixteenth notes. The vocal line tumbles down and up in stepwise motion that feels jagged and declarative without sustained notes. That changes upon reaching measure 18, with a sustained dissonance on the final ironic word of the lyric, "Life double crosses with style, / Forcing you into a smile."⁷⁹ This marks the beginning of the B section and with it a burgeoning sense of frenzy. Phrases become shorter and more chromatic, yet the most damning addition is

⁷⁶ Viertel, *The Secret Life of the American Musical*, 206.

⁷⁷ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 181.

⁷⁸ In a testament to the breadth of rests in this figure, one can faintly hear a studio musician tapping the dotted-quarter pulse during the silence on the original Broadway cast album.

⁷⁹ Coleman and Zippel, 221. All forthcoming "Funny" measure references come from this score.

an oom-pah-pah pattern in lower registers in mm. 25. “Funny” may be marked in a moderate 6 meter, but from this moment on it registers as a whirling waltz, evocative an uncanny carnival. The figure proceeds through a series of minor 9th chords, descending by step in the bass from A-flat down to a D-flat. The reversal of direction in mm. 32 prepares a dominant D7^{b9} which leads to the return of the A section, this time a major sixth higher in a new key of G minor. Stine sings an exact transposition of his original music, but the accompaniment maintains the crazed waltz figure while adding a high woodwind echo of his line. However, he does not stay in G minor for long, returning to the original B-flat to sing an octave higher than where he began.

The orchestra unleashes its densest texture yet with an addition of a hemiola atop the waltz and jeté strings in the top register. (Ex. 5) The number climaxes with the phrase “I can’t laugh anymore,” with a roaring, sustained high F on the final syllable. By these final words, “Funny” has transformed from a song of sarcastic literary puns into a rampage of outrage. The number conjures the spirit of an operatic mad scene, where a character musically renders a crazed descent. Given its location within *City of Angels* and its dynamic nature, the song should also be considered the “11 o’clock” number of the show. “Funny” does little to finish out the plot, but it provides protagonist Stine the chance to show off both his acting and vocal range; it is the sort of number designed specifically to bring thunderous applause. Yet its greater purpose, vis-à-vis film noir, is to provide the exact sort of unhappy ending which would befall a noir protagonist. Stone was shot in the finale to his story, while Stine had his writing credit ripped from him, killing his Hollywood career and maybe his marriage.

Example 5 “Funny,” *City of Angels*, mm. 42.

Stine

Sad e - nough my life's a joke that suf - fers in the

+8va

While Stone and Stine arrive at a similar place at the end of *City of Angels*, they battle along the way when the detective disapproves of a decision by the writer. The impetus comes from a re-write to the character of Muñoz, where his racial motivations are diminished to simple jealousy in love. Remember that a major trait of the hardboiled detective is his strong moral compass, and Stone reads Stine’s acquiescence as an act of weakness and moral compromise, expressing disbelief that the author would fold with so little resistance. “You’re Nothing without Me” makes explicit the duality of Stine’s malleability and Stone’s resilience; it is a challenge duet rather unlike anything else in musical theatre. True, showdowns between two characters were nothing new, particularly in the 1980’s on Broadway. This era premiered iconic duets such as “The Confrontation” from *Les Misérables* (1986) and “Agony” from *Into the Woods* (1987), but antecedents reach back significantly further to models such as “Anything You Can Do” from *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946) and “America” from *West Side Story*. Unlike its predecessors, “You’re Nothing without Me” results from Stone emerging from a show-within-a-show (meaning here the movie) to confront Hollywood character Stine. This device saw use occasionally in film, such as Woody Allen’s *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), but it even has

some precedence in Gelbart's career. In his introduction to Suzy Kalter's *The Complete Book of M*A*S*H*, the writer has an imaginary conversation with fictional psychiatrist Dr. Freedman:

FREEDMAN: Please lie down on my couch.
GELBART: I don't usually do this on a first date.
 (complying, looking up) There's a mirror on the ceiling.
FREEDMAN: I treat a lot of actors.
GELBART: I'm a writer.
FREEDMAN: Of Comedy?
GELBART: Drama. I can't help it if people laugh at it.
FREEDMAN: And that's your problem?
GELBART: *M*A*S*H* is my problem.
FREEDMAN: How'd you do that?
GELBART: What?
FREEDMAN: Speak in asterisks.
GELBART: Comes from doing the series too long.
FREEDMAN: "Doing" it?
GELBART: Writing it, mostly. Stories, scripts, creating characters. I
 invented you.
FREEDMAN: *(suppressing a smile)* Oh, really?
GELBART: Sidney Freeman, the psychiatrist. You're a Sigmund of my
imagination.
FREEDMAN: You actually believe that?
GELBART: All I have to do is backspace and you're out of this scene.⁸⁰

Even with that final declaration of power, Gelbart and Freedman show no animosity for one another. The situation could not be more different with Stone and Stine. In "You're Nothing Without Me," the two protagonists challenge each other for primacy: the writer claims authority and intelligence while the detective claims fame and virility. The detective may have made the first move by questioning Stine's writing, but the author snaps at Stone and opens fire with his slander. One might be struck at how quick Stine is to criticize a character of his own creation, and his assertions of control make him across as anything but authoritative. His assault on

⁸⁰ Gelbart, "Introduction" in Kalter, *The Complete Book of M*A*S*H*, 17.

Stone's autonomy seems to be an attempt to deal with his own dwindling control over the screenplay, and by extension his relationships.

"You're Nothing Without Me" features strophic verses with an accompaniment based on an energetic sixteenth-note pattern. Coleman uses the accented pitches of the accompaniment as the melody for Stine and Stone, which renders as a heavily syncopated line full of tension and aggression. (Ex. 6) After eight bars in this framework, the meter modulates to cut-time and gives the new half-note the same duration as the original quarter-note. This doubles the tempo, but this second section contains twice as many measures, making it temporally equivalent and effectively an A₈B₈ verse structure. The writer and detective take turns launching *ad hominem* attacks at one another, which Zippel loads with wordplay about the characters' professions. Much of their wit comes from sarcastic simile or metaphor, right in line with the Chandler-esque dialogue. For instance, Stine calls Stone a "speck of lint that fell out the last time that (he) picked (his) brain." In the parallel position of Stone's verse, the detective lets his opponent know that his "pen is no match for (Stone's) sword."

Example 6 "You're Nothing without Me," *City of Angels*, mm. 3-4.

The musical score is presented in three staves. The top staff is a single melodic line in 4/4 time, with lyrics written below it. The lyrics are: "You are some gun - shoe, You just don't think — well,". The middle and bottom staves are grouped together with a brace on the left, representing a piano accompaniment. The middle staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both accompaniment staves feature a continuous, energetic sixteenth-note pattern. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

After each man has had the chance for a few cheap shots, the character of the piece shifts drastically to a hard swing for a chorus based on the title phrase “You’re Nothing Without Me.” Rather than trading turns at bat, the protagonists sing nearly all of the lyric together in unison or parallel thirds. This hints at a truth that the audience has known for quite some time: the two are ultimately cut from the same cloth, and not as different as they make themselves out to be. Just like everyone else in *City of Angels*, their actions inform one another, if sometimes as two ends of the same pole. At this point, there is still one critical feature from Abram’s list to be examined: the femme fatale. However, the influence of this character trope casts a much wider shadow on *City of Angels* than any of the other features, and for that reason deserves its own section. The forthcoming investigation will engage with the archetype and the ways in which it informs the women within this show.

Chapter 4: The Femme Fatale

In looking backward for seminal models on which femme fatales might be built, one can see that the archetype is perhaps as old as Eve from the Garden of Eden – Woman who leads to the downfall of Man. Whether operating indirectly through temptation, overtly through murder, or some combination of the two, the stock character rose to particular prominence in hard-boiled novels and film noir in the period just before and after the Second World War. Generally agreed upon to represent a misogynistic binary between “good” and “bad” women, with antecedents reaching back to the virgin-whore dichotomy of medieval poetry, the femme fatale flourished in the 1940’s in part as an “indicator of wartime misgivings about sex roles, marriage and sexuality.”⁸¹ More recent interpretations of hard-boiled fiction have encouraged discussion about the notion of agency available to the femme fatale characters, suggesting that the stereotypical traits represent a mobilization of their “skills in a male-dominated milieu (both textually and at large), breaking normative conceptions and expectations of gender roles by challenging the pattern of female submission, domesticity, and dependence.”⁸² Maysaa Husam Jaber’s theory of criminal femme fatale agency lies at the “intersection between excessive display(s) of feminine gender characteristics, such as the exaggerated sexuality they use to seduce and manipulate men to their advantage, and their apparent deviation from typical gender roles by engaging in ‘masculine’ crime.”⁸³ The notion of crime as masculine was particularly prominent in the mid-twentieth century; early criminological discourse focused nearly exclusively on that which was

⁸¹ Boozer, “The Lethal Femme Fatale in the Noir Tradition,” 20.

⁸² Jaber, *Criminal Femmes Fatales in American Hardboiled Crime Fiction*, 2.

⁸³ Jaber, 3.

perpetrated by men, with women almost completely neglected.⁸⁴ One might see how transgressions by women could be perceived in a particularly fantastical light and indicative of a break from convention or a “natural order of things,” traits that seem conducive to cinema. The forthcoming section of this thesis explores how the women of *City of Angels* operate in dialogue with the femme fatale archetype through their musical numbers, beginning with the woman explicitly labelled as such in the Hollywood cast list: Alaura Kingsley.

Other than the musical voice-over as discussed earlier, Alaura sings only one song, a duet. “The Tennis Song” showcases a back and forth of sexual double entendre between Alaura and Stone. The number draws inspiration from a similar scene in *The Big Sleep* (1946), where Phillip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) and Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall) use horse racing slang as flirtatious banter.⁸⁵

VIVIAN: Well, speaking of horses, I like to play them myself. But I like to see them work out a little first. See if they're front-runners or come from behind.

Find out what their whole card is. What makes them run.

MARLOWE: Find out mine?

VIVIAN: I think so.

MARLOWE: Go ahead.

VIVIAN: I'd say you don't like to be rated. You like to get out in front. Open up a lead, take a little breather in the backstretch. And then come home free.

MARLOWE: You don't like to be rated yourself.

VIVIAN: I haven't met anyone yet that could do it. Any suggestions?

MARLOWE: Well, I can't tell till I've seen you over a distance of ground. You've got a touch of class, but, uh, I don't know how far you can go.

VIVIAN: A lot depends on who's in the saddle.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Sutherland, Cressy, and Luckenbill, *Principles of Criminology*.

⁸⁵ I list the movie date here rather than the source novel because the scene is absent in Raymond Chandler's original book.

⁸⁶ Qtd. In “Classic Scenes: *The Big Sleep*,” *Premiere*, 1996.

And yet, “The Tennis Song” equally contains elements that link it to a songwriter from the musical comedy era: Cole Porter. The composer-lyricist from Peru, Indiana, excelled at list songs and wordplay, and “The Tennis Song” belongs to that tradition. The song’s primary thrust is the list of innuendo itself, and Zippel serves a veritable volley of puns on sport and sex with the intention of reinforcing Alaura’s femme fatale stereotype and building erotic tension for the detective and her. David Savran would argue that the list song is particularly appropriate for escalating that tension, calling the form “a desiring machine” when in the hands of song-writers like Porter.⁸⁷ He suggests that lists, such as those found in “You’re the Top” from *Anything Goes* (1934), are “adept at both unleashing and containing socially or sexually dissident desires.”⁸⁸ Savran was writing about Porter’s semi-closeted homosexuality as publicly illicit, and the same sentiment should be associated with Alaura’s advances on Stone. In the 1940’s, sexual openness still operated on highly gendered lines, and Mrs. Kingsley’s lascivious invitations would have no place in respectable society. Stylistically, “The Tennis Song” is reminiscent of 1940’s big band with a heavy swing and infectious riffs. Both singers’ tessitura is quite low on the verses, especially for Stone – at least compared to typical male ranges in musical theatre.⁸⁹ They sing back and forth in near constant call and response, which of course imitates the actual activity of tennis; muted brass answer their lines to add a further dimension of the imagery. They do eventually arrive at unison for the final phrase, “Shall we say the ball is in your court,” which would imply an end to the exchange. However, dialogue extends the scene as Alaura sends Stone off on his mission to find Mallory, with Alaura getting a final repetition of the line to affirm its

⁸⁷ Savran, ““You’ve Got That Thing”: Cole Porter, Stephen Sondheim, and the Erotics of the List Song,” 534.

⁸⁸ Savran, 538.

⁸⁹ Interestingly, Stone uses ‘tenor’ as a pejorative about Jimmy Powers in the last scene in complaining about his casting, (Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 180.) We should consider reading deepness of voice as an index of the performative masculinity so associated with Film Noir protagonists. This is doubly fascinating when measured the assertion in Symonds and Taylor, *Studying Musical Theatre: Theory and Practice*, 39., where they categorize deepness of voice as an indicator of villainy.

sentiment. Overall, “The Tennis Song” functions as a doubling down not only on the “seduction” element that so often appears as a feature of the femme fatale, but also the noir protagonist’s susceptibility to it.⁹⁰ Stone arrived at Kingsley manor with full intention to quit the job, yet the financial and physical incentives prove too appealing; Coleman and Zippel used sexual associations of its song form as a symbol of the salacious nature of the femme fatale.

As we saw in Stone and Stine with “Double Talk,” a character will exhibit traits that put those of the parallel story in relief; this applies particularly to the women in the Hollywood setting, such as Stine’s wife Gabby. She sings two numbers whose motivation relies primarily upon the woman’s forthrightness: a trait antithetical to the portrayal of women as the femme fatale. The two songs sit in opposite positions in the show and should be considered parallels of one another. The first, “What You Don’t Know about Women,” is a duet with Oolie where each woman disparages how clueless the man in their life is about women (Act I, Scene 6). The second song, “It Needs Work” is a reaction to Stine’s excuse after being caught cheating (Act II, Scene 13).

In the scenes preceding “What You Don’t Know about Women,” Stone thinly veils his attraction to Alaura and Mallory, while Stine unconvincingly promises not to repeat his past infidelity as Gabby leaves for New York (Act I, Scenes 4 and 5). Both situations are uncomfortable for the women, due in part to the men’s insensitivity to their feelings. “What You Don’t Know about Women” expresses Gabby and Oolie’s frustration with this cluelessness by listing various ways in which the Stine and Stone’s interpersonal skills fall short.⁹¹ More

⁹⁰ For full exploration of seduction/susceptibility themes, see Jaber, 73-103.

⁹¹ For simplicity of language, I may refer only to Gabby and Stine moving forward with analysis, but these characteristics could apply equally to Oolie and Stone.

significantly, however, it serves the function of introducing the men vs. women struggle as a major theme of *City of Angels*.

On the musical theatre stage, gender has always been inextricable from the action, even “a constitutive element... fundamental to the musical’s architecture, and as vital a building block as music, lyrics, orchestration, spoken text, choreography and dance, lights, sets, costumes, and props.”⁹² Musicals “provide material for performance” and gender is “above all, a performed attribute of personal identity and so constitutes a central dimension of how people are defined, both onstage and off.”⁹³ Films from the Depression through Postwar eras tend also to operate heavily along gender lines: in film noir yes, but also the screwball comedy. The genre gets its name from the screwball protagonist: a sort of comedic antihero characterized in part by immaturity and frustration in his love life.⁹⁴ He is foiled by a woman defined, in contrast, by her strong-will. These clashing forces generate a “battle of the sexes” motif that permeates both screwball comedy and film noir, creating a central friction for all conflict.⁹⁵ “What You Don’t Know about Women” inherits that sentiment, presenting the women of *City of Angels* as sharp players in opposition with men. The song works in conjunction with the previous scenes: Gabby establishes herself as Stine’s verbal equal and counterpart, directly by the references to editing and implicitly by a constant barrage of sarcastic come-backs. Compared to the naïve Stine, as established in “Double Talk,” Gabby is clearly the more streetwise spouse. Oolie provides plenty of wit in her own right, using Stone’s own words as jabs when he rudely comments on Mallory’s appearance. And yet for all of the work done to develop Gabby and Oolie’s strength in those

⁹² Wolf, *Changed for Good*, 6.

⁹³ Knapp, “The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity,” 205. For fundamental reading on gender as performative, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

⁹⁴ Renzi, *Screwball Comedy and Film Noir*, 9-17.

⁹⁵ Renzi, 13.

scenes, “What You Don’t Know about Women” throws it away for a song that adds more to the men’s characterization than that of the women.⁹⁶ At this point in *City of Angels*, the only other song has been the “Double Talk” sequence with the musical voice-overs/asides and the “I Am” number – all of which related directly to the plot and developed the particular characters of Stone, Alaura, Buddy, and Stine. Instead of enhancing Gabby and Oolie as individuals, “What You Don’t Know about Women” uses them as stand-ins for all women and therefore reduces them to their gender in opposition to the men. They now embody the foil to the screwball protagonist as generic women who see the man as a flawed being.

The problematic and reductive nature of the song partially extends into its actual performance. In the preceding scenes with Stone and Stine, the guys exited the stage with little ceremony. Gabby and Oolie, in contrast, use the act of assembling their outfit to leave as stylized movement for the song.⁹⁷ This gesture overtly conflates womanhood with scarves, hats, and gloves, undermining any message of practicality. To his credit, though, Coleman’s score grants the duo an opportunity to show musical skill and therefore establish credibility and intelligence – a sentiment in line with the song’s lyrical message.⁹⁸ “What You Don’t Know about Women” offers the most tonally challenging number for a named character: it is rife with sudden modulations, wide and awkward intervals, and angular accelerations reminiscent of a Thelonious Monk melody. Inspired by vocalese jazz, the number frequently feels like an instrumental solo set to text. The most poignant of these moments comes in its coda where the women whip out an

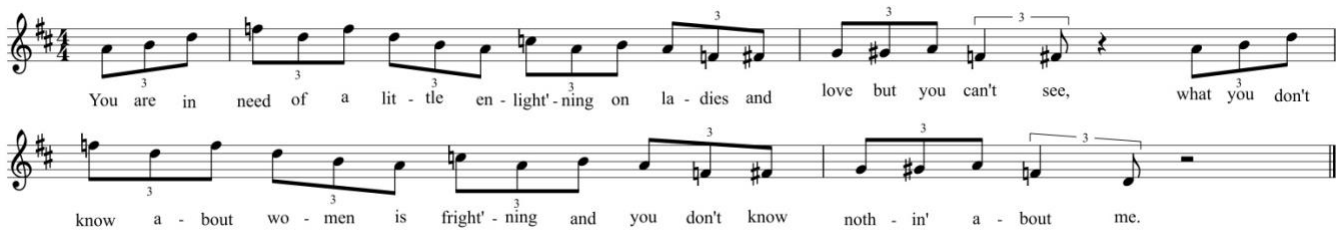
⁹⁶ The number fits nicely with Stacy Wolf’s theorization of female-female duets as pointing toward heteronormativity. Wolf, *Changed for Good*, 32-52.

⁹⁷ While I did not have access to film from the original production and the libretto makes no indication, a YouTube video of the *City of Angels* performance at the 44th Tony Awards provides insight on the movement. The choreography of this number and others was consistent with photographs taken of the full version. “Tony Awards (1990) – City of Angels”

⁹⁸ McMillin, 149-50.

extremely quick and chromatic line that reaches to the top of their belt-mix range (Ex. 7).⁹⁹ So while the lyrical execution he lyrics and perspective of the song do the women few favors, Coleman’s musical elements create a subtext of strength and skill for Gabby and Oolie, and the number successful introduces the men vs. women theme that informs so much of film noir.

Example 7 “What You Don’t Know about Women,” *City of Angels*, mm. 77-81.



Here we should review Oolie’s other number and another song that could be linked to Cole Porter: “You Can Always Count on Me.” The number is an heir to the hit song “Always True to You in My Fashion” from *Kiss me, Kate* (1948). Both offer an ‘I Am’ song comparatively late in the show, near the beginning of Act II, in which the female deuteragonist summarizes her history with relationships. Their structures are conspicuously similar: a slow, sentimental introduction followed by several verses that frequently use the title to end phrases; indeed, both title phrases emphasize the notion of reliability with the word “always.”¹⁰⁰ The division of course comes from the mood of each piece, as Porter’s song flirts while Coleman and Zippel’s laments whimsically. One might see this song as the first of two “blasts of energy” that often grace Act 2, with the second being Stine’s 11 o’clock number “Funny.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, the

⁹⁹ Coleman added these lines during the rehearsal process. They are tremendously difficult to perform live, but the composer showed his versatility by acting also as vocal coach to Randy Graff and Kay McClelland, teaching them how to pull the bit off. Propst, 349-50.

¹⁰⁰ The slow introduction is yet another great example of how shows evolve during the rehearsal process – it was added as late as the tech rehearsals, according to Propst’s interview with original Donna/Oolie, Randy Graff. Propst, 348.

¹⁰¹ Viertel, “The Secret Life of the American Musical”, 205.

critics pointed to this moment as a particular high point in an otherwise convoluted second act. The original ‘Oolie/Donna’ actress, Randy Graff, received a Tony for her performance, and the all-important *New York Times* review from Frank Rich praised this number as one of his favorites for her performance, the song’s especially clever lyrics from Zippel, and its novel use of the monochrome vs. technicolor medium.¹⁰² However, for all of its sassy fun, “You Can Always Count on Me” reveals Oolie/Donna as a hybrid between femme fatale and femme *blanche*.

The femme blanche label applies to those comparatively rare women within film noir who counter the femme fatale with a “potentially positive influence on the protagonist” that “only sometimes succeeds.”¹⁰³ Significant examples include Peg Born in *Body and Soul* (Robert Rossen, 1947), Mary Malden in *On Dangerous Ground* (Nicholas Ray, 1951), and Ann Miller in *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947). Oolie carries out this role throughout *City of Angels*, proving to be a valuable partner and effective investigator while Stone is in jail similarly to Effie in *The Maltese Falcon*. She also qualifies as the more commonly known model of “Girl Friday,” meaning here a female assistant who offered “nurture” and “companionship” for her male employer.¹⁰⁴ Her feelings for Stone never pan out as anything more than a crush, and her part in “You Can Always Count on Me” admits her willingness to go the extra mile for Stone despite his obliviousness to her crush. However, this behavior only exists as an extension of Stine’s perception of her counterpart Donna. At the beginning of *City of Angels*, Buddy’s secretary seems to be a potential ally for Stine as he navigates the unfamiliar realm of Hollywood. She can

¹⁰² Rich, “40’s Hollywood Doubly Mocked In Gelbart’s ‘City of Angels.’” The original cast album contract with RCA included a clause where the review from Rich and Rich alone would be what decided if the record was made or not. Coleman was not fond of this demand, and the project eventually moved to Columbia despite the glowing review. Propst, 352.

¹⁰³ Renzi, 102.

¹⁰⁴ Hill, *Never Done*, 110-11.

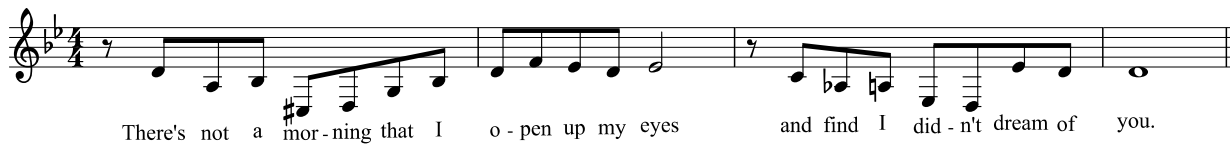
stand up to Buddy (Act 1, Scene 8) and shows a degree of sympathy to Stine's frustrations about the director (Act 1, Scene 12). The professional relationship leads to an extramarital affair, however, somewhat undermining the good qualities exhibited by Oolie. Stine does not grant positive traits to the fictional secretary because he respects her role within the noir world, but because he is sleeping with Donna. "You Can Always Count on Me" reveals that the Hollywood secretary has a long history of being "the other woman." She presents her history as something inescapable or cyclic, which resonates with the rhizomatic themes in noir as discussed in relationship to Stone. Coleman's composition reflects that notion; after the slow introduction, the song is completely strophic with standard AABA' verse structures. One gets the impression that the number could extend *ad infinitum*, limited only by Zippel's lyrical imagination. Yet despite its perennality, Donna's proclivity for promiscuity indicts her as an heir to the femme fatale mold. Love triangles within film noir tend to "disrupt a stable relationship between two people who are already married or have a well-established affiliation."¹⁰⁵ The affair in *City of Angels* disrupts Stine's marriage and paves the way for the screenplay credit debacle, paralleling the damage that occurs to a noir protagonist from trusting a traditional femme fatale.

The final number for engagement is sung by Bobbi, and it is perhaps the one song that could conceivably appear in a legitimate film noir. "With Every Breath I Take" plunges the audience into a smoky cocktail lounge for a diegetic number where Bobbi performs a number with earthy glamour; it directly imitates the sound and setting of a typical femme fatale character. The vocal register sits tremendously low, requiring the actress playing Bobbi to growl

¹⁰⁵ Renzi, 23-4.

out several D3s, and even a brief C#3.¹⁰⁶ (Ex.8a) This tints the entire song with melancholy and fits the seedy club in which it takes place (Act 1, Scene 10). The scene has clear precedence in film noir: consider Coral, portrayed by Lizabeth Scott in *Dead Reckoning*, whose “Either it’s Love or it Isn’t” is similarly husky and alluring. When Bobbi sings this initial rendition, her real-life counterpart Gabby has left Stine in Hollywood and returned to New York. He might be too proud to articulate it directly, but the absence of his wife weighs heavily on him and it manifests in Stone’s pining for Bobbi. Just as Buddy drove Stine and Gabby apart, the scene following “With Every Breath I Take” sees the producer’s counterpart Irwin create a rift in Bobbi and Stone’s relationship.

Example 8a “With Every Breath I Take”, *City of Angels* mm. 5-8



Example 8b “With Every Breath I Take”, *City of Angels*, mm. 5-6.



As the lyrics in the example suggest, “With Every Breath I Take” falls under the archetype of a torch song, meaning a song about holding onto lost or unrequited love. This particular numbers laments the distant beloved from the first moments of the day (“There’s not a

¹⁰⁶ Here, I am using the key of G minor as performed on the cast recording, but written versions of the song suggest other possible tonal centers. The published piano-vocal score is in A minor, and the version licensed by MTI indicates B-flat minor.

morning when I open up my eyes/ and find I didn't dream of you.”), a sentiment which can be found in other torch songs, such as “Losing my Mind” from *Follies* (1971). The constancy of Bobbi’s heartache perhaps amounts to obsession, which is particularly appropriate since the opening chord progression includes a sonority (Ex. 8b) highly reminiscent of the “Love Theme” from the classic thriller *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958). A classic example of noir in its own right, the film explores themes of obsession and control from the perspective of a disgraced cop – not dissimilar from Stone’s situation. The chord in question might be labeled as a D13^{#9}, but the F natural on top should probably be treated as an appoggiatura into a blue-note. The *Vertigo* version transforms the chord across several roots through a technique of sliding, as meant in Frank Lehman’s system of pantriadic chromaticism.¹⁰⁷ Coleman does not attempt a similar cyclic transformation, and instead opts for the brief referential insertion within the introduction as an important index for “real” film noir scores; this distinction and inclusion of surface level features, such as the night club and lounge singer tropes, easily connect Bobbi to the typical imagery of the femme fatale. Such indices play a major role in *City of Angels*’ simulation of film noir and 1940s Hollywood, as will be discussed in the final section of this essay.

¹⁰⁷ Lehman, *Hollywood Harmony: Musical Wonder and the Sound of Cinema*, 154–55.

Chapter 5: The Studio

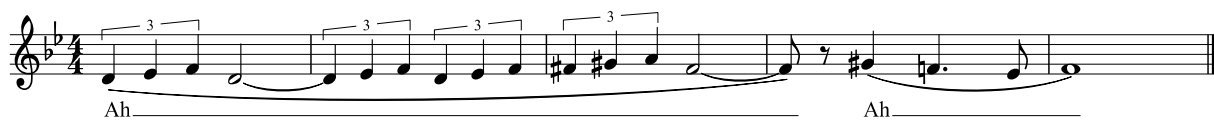
Outside of its direct references to film noir, *City of Angels* creates associations through indexical links to movie music and classic Hollywood. This final section will engage with a few elements: first, a musical theme that opens the show and provides material for underscoring, but is never sung by a named character and therefore eschews the function of the standard Broadway overture. Other instances of underscoring will also receive attention, particularly the featured “Alaura’s Theme.” Finally, two characters, Buddy and Jimmy, will be viewed as indicators of the entertainment industry in general. I contend that generic links to Hollywood amplify the overall efforts of *City of Angels* to effectively emulate film noir of the 1940s.

City of Angels opens with an overture that does more than simply foreshadow musical themes. While it does briefly present “Alaura’s Theme” which appears later, it might be more accurate to call the piece a prologue. Indeed, Cy’s score uses the word “prologue” to label the number, despite Gelbart’s reference to it as “overture” in the published script. Instead, the piece suggests the edgy and sinister nature of the overall musical, similar to the way in which a Wagner prelude would look ahead to an Act and generate a sonic summary of the important themes. The more likely model, however, is the theme that underscores the opening credits in a film. The main theme emerges in later underscoring, but never gets sung by the characters, which suggests the number being of the musical itself, rather than to be associated with any particular person. And yet, a single theme from later in *City of Angels* does get a referential sounding in this opening prologue: “Alaura’s theme” (mm. 12-15).

When Del plays “Alaura’s theme” at the piano (Act 1, Scene 10), it offers an interesting exercise in engaging with film-music elements on the stage. It is ostensibly a diegetic number in

which the movie's score composer Del performs a segment from the film on a piano while Buddy comments over it. As the number proceeds, it shifts from simply the composer at the piano to its fully realized form, as marked by the chorus of voices and increased orchestration. Akin to a number such as "Think of Me" from *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986) that transitions from rehearsal to the performed show-within-a-show midway through, "Alaura's Theme" helps pivot the action from Hollywood to the movie. One should read this phenomenon as an instance of ambi-diegesis, as the line is blurred between what is called for by the book and what can be considered omniscient underscoring by the orchestra.¹⁰⁸ The theme seems to be composed on stage as inspired by cues from Buddy to imitate Tara's Theme from 1939's *Gone with the Wind* (Act II, Scene 10; original theme composer by Max Steiner). The lush orchestrations, neutral choral syllables, and sudden modulations do grant it a character similar to that era of Hollywood score.

Example 9 "Alaura's Theme," *City of Angels*.



Dramatically the scene with "Alaura's Theme" offers little in terms of moving the plot forward or revealing inner machinations of a character. Two possibilities seem to emerge, then, about the function of the number. The first and more ambitious option requires a more specialized knowledge of film, specifically on the character of Tara, whose theme Buddy hums to the pianist Del. The *Gone with the Wind* protagonist spends most of that movie manipulating or misleading the men in her life, feigning affection and love in order to get closer to her selfish

¹⁰⁸ McMillin, 131.

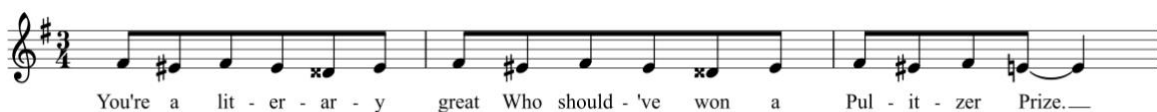
goals. This offers a parallel to the femme fatale Alaura, for whom the theme is composed. An easier alternative is to explain “Alaura’s Theme” as an opportunity for Coleman to emulate a classic cinematic score to underline the Hollywood theme of *City of Angels*, such as the similarly named “Laura’s Theme” from *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944, theme composed by David Raskin). By the time Del foregrounds the melody in the second act, the audience would have been intimately, if implicitly familiar with the motive by its official Act II appearance; it appears in several of the short interludes to underscore the dialogue, most of which were commissioned by music director Robert Lowry Harrell during the rehearsal process. Typically, Coleman would pull an actor (often the original Stone, James Naughton) to read the dialogue in order for the composer to sense the mood of the action, and then pull from existing melodies to create an appropriate underscore.¹⁰⁹ “Alaura’s Theme” provides the material for several of these underscored moments, typically those which involve the titular character. As referenced above, the number is “composed” at the piano during Buddy’s soiree, and we see that Del originally intended for the melody to bear a rather different quality. However, the ubiquitous meddling Buddy Fidler submits the composer to his own vision, and with it creates the version of the number that we hear through *City of Angels*. This seems an appropriate point to consider the director himself, and the ways in which he draws a connection to Hollywood stereotypes, in part through his comedic song form.

While not a reference to any specific movie, Buddy Fidler, the main antagonist of *City of Angels*, is an allusion to famous real-world film producer Samuel Goldwyn, who produced films throughout the classic Hollywood era. Buddy shows a proclivity for malapropism akin to the “Goldwynisms” of his inspiration. While the original man might only have occasionally slipped

¹⁰⁹ Propst, 349.

a brief incongruity, nearly all of Buddy's dialogue fumbles an idiom or contradicts itself to humorous effect. Consider his response when asked if he likes Stine's draft in Act 1, Scene 8: "Like is for pishers. These are to love! They're perfect. But we'll fix 'em."¹¹⁰ This line also shows Buddy's penchant for creative control; in the "Double Talk" sequence near the beginning of *City of Angels*, his musical aside wasted no time in revealing a willingness to manipulate Stine. Buddy's solo number, "The Buddy System" combines the notions of control, contradiction, and participation in classic Hollywood in a patter song that is both humorous and easily connected to the cinematic world. Where most patter songs in the musical theatre tradition are a symmetrical duple or quadruple meter, Buddy's is a lilting jazz waltz devised on tightly chromatic turns (Ex. 10). However, it still allows the director a lyric-driven, humorous number, in the lineage of "I am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General" from *The Pirates of Penzance* and "Let's Not Talk about Love" from *Let's Face It* (1941); this second song in particular is similarly segmented to "The Buddy System," vacillating between different speeds with ample rubato.

Example 10 "The Buddy System," *City of Angels*, mm. 38-40.



Throughout the number, Buddy makes reference to real figures of Hollywood and commonly held stereotypes about the film industry. He namedrops Erich von Stroheim and Josef von Sternberg, two pioneers of silent cinema, claiming to be the "heir to their skills." His self-aggrandizement does not stop there, as he also flashes accolades and markers of excess, meaning here the stereotypical ex-wives and cars. Threats that the writer "wouldn't want to upset Buddy"

¹¹⁰ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 51. Also notice the Yiddish slang "pisher." Gelbart and Zippel occasionally interject such words as an index of Jewishness for these characters, as is the stereotype for the classic Hollywood directors. Another prominent instance is "bupkis" in the finale.

are thinly veiled, and the director seems to revel in the fact that he has power over Stine's success in Hollywood, representative of the gatekeeping that directors and producers had and still have over would-be artists in film.

Other than the rare instances of Stone crossing over into Hollywood to interact with Stine, Jimmy Powers is the only character with the same role in both storylines. His pop songs exist in both the "real world" and in the movie, and provide thematic underscoring to several scenes. The first for consideration, "Look Out for Yourself," both introduces the balladeer Jimmy Powers and offers contrasting conventions from theatre and film. The nature of a stage work allows an audience member to shift his or her gaze to any focal point on stage that they desire; techniques might be used to draw their attention, but they retain the agency look at that which might not be foregrounded. Movies take away some of this agency through close ups and framing. The shot is decided by the creative team, obviating some of the viewer's role. "Look Out for Yourself" practices that predetermination of focus found in film through techniques endemic to the stage. When the gangster Sonny turns up the radio, the studio set "moves across the stage, obscuring" the violence taking place in Stone's apartment.¹¹¹ The deliberate foregrounding of the performers imitates the forced perspective in film; the audience is denied full access to the brutality enacted on Stone. Projected shadows suggesting the beating, also cross over into film conventions, where shadows often allow a suggestion of something off-screen. However, unlike in a movie, the set piece creates this phenomenon by stacking one scenario on top of the other, relying on visual depth rather than framing. "Look Out for

¹¹¹ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, *City of Angels*, 47.

Yourself” stresses the importance of vigilance and self-reliance, appropriate considering the violence happening to Stone concurrently. Its cheerful style, particularly the saccharine backup exclamations (“Oh Yeah!”) provide ironic contrast to the beating, and the lyrics inform Stone’s decision to attempt to quit the case in his next scene at the Kingsleys. The use of a live broadcast is biographically appropriate for Coleman, as his early career saw him playing similar gigs on both radio and the days of nascent daytime television.¹¹² He and Zippel perhaps used that experience to successfully spin a song that provides clear theatrical commentary on the plot while being vague enough to pass as a generic pop hit, extractable from the context. In an interview late in his career, Coleman stressed how the duality between dramatic function and extractability deeply informed his song-writing.¹¹³ That quality of removability, along with the diegesis and emphasis on the performer’s talent, seem to place “Look Out for Yourself” firmly within the musical comedy tradition, as this was the common practice in the pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein era, exemplified by the songs of Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and the Gershwins.

Jimmy Powers’ other number, “Stay with Me,” brims with enough trite declarations of devotion to make it just as extractable as Jimmy’s first song, but the function is noticeably different here. If “Look Out for Yourself” is overly peppy and enthusiastic, then this second song over-indulges in crooner’s sentimentality. The ballad “Stay with Me” appears a few times throughout the musical, though often not in its full form. An abbreviated rendition can be heard as early as in Stone’s apartment before his encounter with the gangsters (Act I, Scene 7), and Jimmy sings it live off-stage at Buddy’s soireé, with Del at the piano accompanying (Act II,

¹¹² Propst, 29–38.

¹¹³ American Theatre Wing, “The Composer (Career Guides)”, 2001.

Scene 9). Its most complete version opens Act II, where we see the studio session in which it is recorded; it continues into the next scene on Carla's phonograph. "Stay with Me" belongs to the tradition of Act II openers that offer a musical reorientation for the audience, but only indirectly contribute to the plot.¹¹⁴ Consider for example "That was a Real Nice Clambake" from *Carousel* (1945) or "I Feel Pretty" from *West Side Story*. These numbers do not progress the story forward, instead providing ironic contrast to both the crisis at the end of Act I and the forthcoming conflict. "Stay with Me" similarly brings the audience back to LA for a sweet ballad that ignores the tension between characters. And yet, the recording session suffers a false start when Jimmy stops to elaborately clear his throat mid verse. Gelbart's stage directions call for annoyed reactions from the other studio musicians, which establishes the balladeer as unlikeable and weak. Those traits will inform the rest of Act II, including Buddy's set-up with his wife and his questionable casting as Stone in the final scene.

That final scene may be the one moment in *City of Angels* that completely eschews film noir, and the slapstick ending and "marriage" number firmly plant it within the musical comedy tradition. Following the roaring "11 o'clock" number, "Funny," the last scene takes us to the actual movie set where Buddy and crew are shooting the last scene of the film in the Kingsley solarium (Act 2, Scene 19). Nearly the entire cast has gathered, and Buddy's Goldwynisms are on full display as wave after wave of minor characters are subjected to his direction on everything from prop soup to tucked-in shirts. The fast paced dialogue and rotating door of characters feel reminiscent of a vaudeville sketch or George S. Kaufman comedy; everyone has high energy for the first day on set, with the noticeable exception of Stine. Still irate from the

¹¹⁴ Viertel, "The Secret Life of the American Musical", 179-86.

scene prior, he confronts Buddy about the screenplay credit, which Buddy dismisses with an admittedly accurate retort: “Why (don’t you believe that we’ll fix it)? Because you’re honest. Because you know in your heart-of-heart that I was with you page-for-page. You *know* my name belongs there.”¹¹⁵ This situation is inspired by a real-life event for Larry Gelbart. In working on a script for *Oh, God!* (Carl Reiner, 1977), the director added his own name to Gelbart’s screenplay credit, claiming “studio policy” as his rationale and ruining their friendship in the process.¹¹⁶ Both protagonists get a chance at outrage; Jimmy Powers is revealed in the role of Stone, and the detective we know materializes next to Stine, apparently invisible to all but the writer. The filming begins, but it doesn’t get far before Stine bellows out “Cut!” This infuriates Buddy, and the two verbally destroy all contracts or deals. Two studio cops are called on Stine, but Stone – in an outrageous *deus ex machina* – sits at the typewriter and “types out” Stine beating up the cops and rewinding the actions of crew members. This is obviously a reversal of the device when Stine edited his screenplay, causing Stone and company to move backwards. The author’s actions make sense, considering the film noir characters are a manifestation of his script, but Stone’s power to carry out similar control is preposterous and therefore totally in line with expectations for musical comedy. In a reversal of the Act I closer, the finale of *City of Angels* brings Stine and Stone together with “I’m Nothing Without You.” With most of the cast frozen after Stone’s typewriter trick, the pair seem to sing only inside of Stine’s head.¹¹⁷ The number resonates with the trope of a wedding ending, and its overall message suggests an end to conflict as brought about by the men’s reunion. Stone and Stine complete most of a refrain before the

¹¹⁵ Gelbart, Coleman, Zippel, 185.

¹¹⁶ Based on an e-mail exchange with Gelbart, in Malarcher, *Tickets to his Head*, 283.

¹¹⁷ Stone actually acknowledged a few lines back that he only exists in Stine’s head, with the line “Ever have anybody puke inside your head?” His sarcasm comes as a reaction to Jimmy Powers attempting to give his lines. Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 190.

detective rushes to the typewriter to punch out “a Hollywood ending.” At this command, “the giant doors at the back of the sound stage open to admit Gabby, who joins them, to the delight of the company, now unfrozen.”¹¹⁸ No explanation is given on how any of this works or makes sense, but the non-realist, overly jovial ending provides sharp contrast to the bleak endings associated with film noir. Compare this with how the story with Stone and Alaura concluded, with bullets in both the protagonist and villain!

¹¹⁸ Gelbart, Coleman, and Zippel, 193.

Conclusions

The final scene intentionally contradicts noir by indulging the musical comedy side of the show, and in doing so it makes the audience all the more aware that *City of Angels*, up until this point, had successfully rendered film noir for the stage. This was not a neo-noir which reinterpreted the core elements as pastiche, but a recreation of the cinematic movement *through* the medium of musical comedy. Coleman, Zippel, and Gelbart made a cultural history of film noir and 1940s Hollywood by using their own genre to reveal the significance and thematic undercurrents of the cultural object. To reuse an earlier quotation from Avila's overview of the subject as it pertains to the United States, historians of culture strive "to capture the less tangible, less quantifiable aspects of the human past, the expression of meaning, values, symbols, ideas, knowledge, and ideology, as packaged within cultural texts."¹¹⁹ It matters little whether this was a conscious intent of the *City of Angels* creative team, for their diligent work to simulate the spoken word (Gelbart), divulge themes through lyrical design (Zippel), and sonically signal the era and films (Coleman), convincingly connects the form to its place within larger society in its moment of relevance as well as the ways in which current audiences view it from a twenty-first century perspective.

This thesis is part of a larger research interest in the composer Cy Coleman, particularly focused in how he used a versatile composing voice to engage with a variety of subjects. For when looking to the composer's body of work, one sees that *City of Angels* was not his only venture into the realms of cultural history. *Barnum* (1980, book by Mark Bramble and lyrics by Michael Stewart) unpacks the spirit of nineteenth century circuses from the perspective of a

¹¹⁹ Avila, *American Cultural History*, 3.

biography on P.T. Barnum; in an interview, Coleman confessed that his interests laid not with the man, but with the circus itself.¹²⁰ *On the Twentieth Century* (1978, book by Betty Comden, lyrics by Comden and Adolph Green), recreates the lavish luxury of the eponymous train through operetta similar to Sigmund Romberg or Rudolf Friml.¹²¹ *I Love My Wife* (1977, book and lyrics by Stewart) captures the spirit of the sexual revolution through popular styles, and *The Will Rogers Follies* (1991, book by Peter Stone, lyrics by Comden and Green) presents the performer within the framework of the Ziegfeld Follies. Each of these scores utilizes a completely different, yet appropriate idiom for its subject.

I conclude, then, by proposing a framework for future scholarship on Cy Coleman: *the musical comedy as cultural history*. Particularly following his partnership with Dorothy Fields, cut short by her death in 1974, Coleman took on projects of a historical nature and composed music which sonically renders the topics' values and ideologies. His work extends beyond pastiche or imitation, striving instead to externalize what a cultural text meant in its moment of relevance. This proposition does not exclude the possibility of other theatre composers achieving a similar product, but it does contend that Coleman, with his malleable musical voice, was among its giants. So effective was he at using "all of the colors in his palette" that Coleman used to say that "critics couldn't figure out who he was."¹²² In forthcoming studies on his musical comedies, I might suggest that Coleman "was" whoever the project needed him to be.

¹²⁰ American Theatre Wing, "The Composer (Career Guides)", 2001.

¹²¹ Kantor and Maslon, *Broadway*, 350-51.

¹²² Coleman, Shelby, "Foreword" in Propst, ix.

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